



THE FELLOWSHIP MEETING.

THE
FELLOWSHIP PRAYER-MEETING:
THE INSTITUTION, NATURE, HISTORY, AND
ADVANTAGES
OF
SELECT CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP;
WITH
DIRECTIONS FOR CONDUCTING SOCIAL RELIGIOUS
EXERCISES.

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Dedication.

**TO THE
ELDERS, DEACONS, AND MEMBERS
OF THE
REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CONGREGATION
OF KNOCKBRACKEN,**

**THIS WORK IS DEDICATED,
UNDER A DEEP SENSE OF THE UNIFORM CORDIAL KINDNESS,
SUPPORT AND SYMPATHY, WHICH THEY HAVE
ALWAYS MANIFESTED TOWARDS HIM IN
LABOURS AND TRIALS;**

**AND
WITH EARNEST DESIRES THAT, UNDER THE DIVINE BLESSING,
IT MAY CONTRIBUTE TO THEIR SPIRITUAL BENEFIT,**

BY THEIR

ATTACHED PASTOR.

KNOCKBRACKEN, Dec. 1855.

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INTRODUCTION.

MALACHI III. 16, 17.

"Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another. and the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name."

"And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him."

THE period when Malachi, the last prophet of the Old Testament, uttered, by the Spirit of inspiration, these remarkable words, was one of deep and solemn interest. More than a century had elapsed since a band of captive Hebrews, under the guidance of Ezra the scribe, and the able leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua, had returned to the land of their fathers, and had taken measures for rebuilding the temple and Jerusalem, and for re-establishing the ancient polity, civil and ecclesiastical. For a time, the restored Hebrews appeared to be animated by the spirit of genuine patriotism and ardent piety; and notwithstanding the opposition of enemies, and great outward difficulties, the good work had gone on and prospered. The servants of God who conducted the undertaking were men of a right spirit—deeply impressed with the exciting remembrance of the

former greatness of their nation—intensely affected on account of its present fallen condition—alive to the claims of Jehovah's law upon their devoted homage, and earnestly looking forward to the glory that was in future to be revealed—to the promotion of which all their efforts were dedicated.

Holy prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, were raised up, and commissioned to animate the builders of the temple; and as often as some adverse change took place in the affairs of the returned captives, through the hostility of unfriendly Persian rulers, or the apathy and worldliness of the people themselves, they revived their drooping spirits, and stimulated them to renewed exertions, by presenting to them the thrilling memories of former times, and by disclosing to them the future glory and distinction to be enjoyed by their nation, through the advent of the long-promised Messiah. The frame-work of the civil polity had at length been settled—the institutions of worship had been re-modelled according to the Divine pattern. The Temple had been finished, which, although not externally “magnificent” as was that built by King Solomon, was yet to surpass it in glory, by receiving within its walls incarnate Deity—the substantial Shechinah—God personally dwelling between the cherubim. This auspicious commencement was followed by years of sad declension. The first race of devoted labourers, who had braved the perils of the journey from Babylon, and the opposition of heathen adversaries in the land, and had established a pure worship, and a Scriptural government, had been called away from earthly trials to their glorious reward. Men destitute of public spirit had succeeded. Religion

had degenerated into an empty form. The wall of Jerusalem was broken down—the chambers of the Temple had been polluted by the admission of uncircumcised idolaters—the Jewish people had forgotten their recent signal deliverance, and had sunk into a state of carnal ease, and contented indifference. Affairs were rapidly hastening to ruin, when Nehemiah was raised up to seek the good of Jerusalem. Through his eminent public spirit, and by means of his self-denied exertions, gross abuses were corrected—the desolations of Jerusalem were repaired—the machinations of enemies were thwarted—corruptions in practice were purged away—and the newly erected commonwealth, rulers and people, were engaged in solemn covenant to be the Lord's.

Cotemporary with this faithful Reformer, or acting in concert with him, at least in the latter part of his administration, was the prophet Malachi. His mission was to reprove sins of aggravated demerit that extensively prevailed in the land of Israel; to excite and animate the faithful servants of God, as they mourned over various great evils in the Church and commonwealth, and were exposed to imminent external dangers; and to gladden their hearts with the assurance that the heavenly Messenger, the Lord whom they sought, would speedily come to his Temple. The concluding period of his ministry, as it would appear from his solemn warnings and fervid denunciations, witnessed an increase of irreligion and ungodliness in the land of Israel. The service of the sanctuary was forsaken—tithes and offerings were withheld, and the ministry was secularised. Hypocrites and formalists abounded, who copied the sins of their fathers,

robbed God of his due, and manifested in all their conduct about religion a narrow, selfish, contracted spirit. Blasphemers wearied God with their words, accounted the proud and prosperous wicked happy; and ignorant of their own character, and self-deceived, were ever ready to deny God's being, providence, and perfection, when they were balked in their schemes, or when their enemies prevailed. Profane infidels and impious scoffers spoke "stout" words against God. They said it is "vain to serve the Lord," and "what profit is it that we have kept his ordinances, and walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?" These were the spirit and language of hardened unbelief and presumptuous confidence. Making a merit of their religious duties and counterfeited humiliation, they yet daringly contemned God's service—virtually declared that rebels, who had cast off all religion, had the advantage—and, for their own part, seemed prepared to adopt the cause of open and utter ungodliness.

Amidst this abounding wickedness—many bold leaders in iniquity, and many following their steps, while there were few to stand in the breach, or to stem the torrent—a small number was yet left, of whom the most honourable testimony is borne in the evil time, and for whom is reserved a glorious recompense of reward. Like stars twinkling in a murky firmament, they appear shining in beauteous lustre, and relieve the dismal gloom, holding forth the hope of deliverance and future blessing. The prophetic spirit, ere it takes its departure from the Church, lingers with evident delight in depicting the character of this faithful few—in describing their loved employment, and in fixing the thought

upon the eminent glory that awaited them, when their labours and trials were finished. Just before announcing the coming of “the great and dreadful day of the Lord,”—when tremendous judgments should be executed on the wicked,—and before proclaiming the rising of the Sun of righteousness, with “healing under his wings,” the prophet expatiates with peculiar interest on those who feared the Lord, and thought upon his name; and he holds up to view “the mark of the prize of their high calling,” when he declares “they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in the day that I make up my jewels.”

With peculiar emphasis, Malachi portrays the character of this remnant of devoted ones, and notes the time when they dared to be singular. They “*feared the Lord*” when others contemned his authority, and waxed bold in iniquity. Holy awe of the Divine Majesty—a prevailing sense of his gracious presence—dread of offending Him, and of coming short of his rest, filled their minds. This was their predominant feeling. They walked humbly with God while others careered in mad-dened folly, and exulted in insolent boasting. They thought upon the Divine name, while others despised and blasphemed it. It was the object of their fervent and supreme affections—the stronghold of their confidence—the theme of their joyful praise. The character of Israel’s God, as their strength, comfort, and portion for ever, sustained their spirits, and enabled them to rejoice even in tribulation. All their enjoyments and hopes were centered in the Divine name, and with wrapt exultation, they ever declared, “Some trust in chariots, and some in

horses; but we will remember the name of the Lord our God." "In God we boast all the day long, and praise thy name for ever."* This was to them the most engaging, fertile subject,—an inexhaustible theme of contemplation for all time and for eternity. "I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being. My meditation of Him shall be sweet. I will be glad in the Lord."† Fervently did these fearers of the Lord love his blessed name, as others despised and reproached it, earnestly did they seek to honour it; and their highest ambition was to diffuse abroad everywhere the savour of his truth and salvation.

They were distinguished, too, by their *fellowship and intercourse*. Separated from a godless and perverse generation, they cultivated intercourse with fellow-believers. They chose their company, and placed all their delight in the saints—the excellent of the earth.‡ They were attracted to them by feelings of the strongest affection, and bound to them by ties the most tender and endearing. United in bonds of a holy brotherhood, and cemented by a love the most powerful that exists among creatures, and as gathered into one family, and made partakers of a common salvation and hope, they rejoiced in the mutual participation of blessed privileges, and they exercised joint sympathy in privation and trial. From the fulness of the heart their mouths spake. Their conversation was in heaven. They gave utterance to their loving and deep thoughts on God's name, for mutual exhortation, encourage-

* Psalm xx. 7; xliv. 8. † Psalm civ. 33, 34. ‡ Psalm xvi. 2.

ment, and comfort. Their language was ever, "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what He hath done for my soul." "These things have we spoken unto you that ye may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."* Their holy converse contrasted with the profane and polluting intercourse of the ungodly—with the cavils of the infidel, the sneers of the blasphemer, and the ribald songs of the licentious. And singularly was it approved and accepted. While they conversed and prayed together, their own loved Lord was a delighted listener. "He hearkened and heard," and recorded their pious words in his "book of remembrance," to be preserved in an indelible record, and to be produced hereafter as evidence of their being entitled to immortal honour and glory.

And, finally, they were characterised by *devoted obedience*. They served God as a son with his father. Their lives were dedicated to Him—they greatly delighted in the way of his commandments—and, as a dutiful child, cherishing constant affection to a worthy parent, and concerned for his honour, in the spirit of adoption, they did service to their Father in heaven. Their time, their talents, their lives, they regarded as wholly his. The employments in which they willingly engaged they viewed as their "Father's business," and they found them to be perfect freedom. Their highest desire was to meet the approval of their glorious and gracious Master. How illustrious the honour and reward prepared for these servants of God! Unnoticed

* Psalm lxxvi. 16; 1 John i. 8.

and despised by an apostate generation, they were yet objects of special regard to Him who sits upon the throne. He was present at their mutual conferences, and registered their gracious words. In his book of living remembrances, He enrolled their names; and their services in a degenerate age He recorded as pleasing and acceptable to Him, and as destined to receive an illustrious reward. Their pious speeches were regarded as the fruit of grace in the heart, and as indicating the principles which they were prepared to embody in devoted and sustained exertion. The sighs of these mourners in Zion were inscribed in God's book, as their tears were collected into his bottle, and none of their words or prayers were ever to be lost, or effaced from the Divine remembrance. They were to be abundantly recompensed in the resurrection of the just. A portion in the grace of the covenant is guaranteed to them now, and a share hereafter in the glory to be revealed. "*I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serves him.*" Even the most eminent servants of God are sensible that they need sparing mercy. Hence Nehemiah prays, "Lord, spare me, according to the greatness of thy mercy," and David exclaims—"If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquity, who could stand?"* The favour extended to these fearers of God is that of a father to a son that serveth him. He is not strict to mark iniquity against them. He accepts their persons in the Beloved. He puts the best construction upon their pious designs, and makes the best of their services. He mitigates their afflic-

* Nehemiah xiii. 22. Ps. cxxxi. 3.

tions, saves them from death, and regards them ever with the infinite pity and complacency of the Father in heaven towards his children.

“They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in the day that I make up my jewels.” How unspeakable the honour conferred upon them at last! They are now God’s “peculiar treasure.” To them are appropriated the whole privileges of God’s Israel, when others are disinherited and rejected. Like “precious jewels,” they are esteemed of rare and great value—they are polished with the utmost care—preserved so that they cannot be lost, and destined to the highest ultimate honour. The day when these jewels shall be all gathered, is “the day of the revelation of Christ,” and, at the same time, of “the manifestation of the sons of God.” Their polishing complete, their imperfection fully removed, they are then set in a diadem of honour, each shining with remarkable brilliancy in its appropriate place, and all together reflecting the matchless glory of their exalted King. They are then, in the amplest sense, fully and for ever his, as there is no more any contrary part in them, and they are separate from others, as He publicly owns them, and they are perfectly assured of their sonship. This honour shall be conferred upon them before an admiring universe.

Such were the beloved of the Lord in the degenerate times of the last of the Old Testament prophets; such were their character and works; and such was their eminent distinction. Need we add that in this attractive picture there are sketched the grand features of pure and undefiled religion, and its bright reward in every subsequent period? Un-

der a more spiritual dispensation, even amidst the expanding evangelical light of the nineteenth century, there is nothing wanting in this delineation to exhibit the character of faithful and approved servants of God; as we cannot conceive of higher privileges and of a more exalted honour than those which are declared in this passage, to be shared on earth and enjoyed in heaven. While moral and spiritual darkness overspreads vast portions of the world's population—while, even in Christian lands, many act like the scoffers and blasphemers of Malachi's day—while within the Church lukewarmness prevails, and “the love of many has waxed cold,” there are a few yet who fear the Lord and think on his name, and who serve Him with devoted affection, as a son his father.

By one marked feature has this faithful remnant in all past times been characterised, and this they should aim to exhibit as their chief distinction at the present eventful period. “THEY SPAKE OFTEN ONE TO ANOTHER.” Disciples of Christ are required to cultivate a holy and endearing fellowship. The “communion of saints” is not only to be an article of their creed—it is to be practically embodied in their whole spirit and life, and to find its expression in all ways appropriate for its exercise. Primitive Christianity will be revived, and become mighty to convince a gainsaying world, when it can be said as of old—“See how these Christians love one another.” Spiritual intercourse among the fearers of God will be a means of blessing,—their union will be their defence against common enemies. Mutual counsel and united prayer will animate in difficulties, and nerve to successful efforts for pro-

moting the kingdom of Christ. Thus will the reproach of the Church's divisions cease. In seasons of trial and prevailing judgments, the faithful will be spared in Divine mercy and compassion, and theirs shall be a glorious reward in the day that "the jewels" of the King are fully made up and set in his diadem of glory.

To speak thus often one to another, the friends of truth need to be brought together in a *special ordinance of worship*, for spiritual converse and united prayer. They may be, as there *will* certainly be among real saints, occasional intercourse otherwise, as those who are so separated either by distance or by unhappy divisions, that they cannot meet on earth, will yet hold fellowship in Christ the Head, and at the mercy-seat. But "to speak often one to another," it is requisite that; like the primitive Christians, believers should meet together in one place, and have stated times for mutual edification and united prayer and praise. The FELLOWSHIP PRAYER MEETING is an institution admirably adapted to subserve these important purposes. Claiming a scriptural warrant for its distinct observance, it has ever been associated with seasons of revival in the Church, and with the highest triumphs of Divine truth in the earth. Its disuse has been the sad and sure index of the decay of evangelical principle and practical godliness; and in the future universal diffusion and triumph of the truth, we are assured that this ordinance will have a conspicuous place. "Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, It shall yet come to pass, that there

shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities: And the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts; I will go also.'''*

* Psalm ii. 8. Zechariah viii. 20, 21.

CHAPTER I.

COMMUNION OF SAINTS.

NEXT to communion with God himself, the fellowship of saints is one of the most exalted and endearing privileges which can be realized on earth. Little as it may be understood or valued in our day, it is yet an article of the creed of the universal Church. "I BELIEVE IN THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS" is not only a part of our Christian profession, but, as a practical principle, it is inseparably connected with the enjoyment of spiritual benefit from the word, and with our edification and comfort in the Divine life. Speaking of the result of inspired teaching, the Apostle John declares, "*That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.*"* We are here taught, 1. That a principal design of the proclamation of the Gospel, whether by preaching or by Christian intercourse, is to bring believers into a holy fellowship. 2. That this fellowship of saints stands in

* 1 John i. 3.

immediate connexion with communion with a Three-One God himself. Those who, by their believing on the word, are brought into this sacred fraternity of saints, are thereby introduced into friendly and familiar intercourse with the God of salvation, and become partakers of its high and inestimable blessings. By the communion of saints, believers, the members of one holy family, and partakers of the common salvation, and of the same blessed hope, have a mutual interest in matters of the highest importance. They are separated from the rest of the world, and *incorporated into one spiritual body*. Marked with the same seal and badge of a holy profession, they are called to like solemn duties—they are led to engage in similar services, and to encounter like fears, dangers, and common enemies. They have joys and privileges in common; they live to the same high end, and they cherish the like expectations, and are animated by the same blessed hopes. Hence result the offices of a sacred brotherhood. A warm interest and complacency in saints is a fruit of the new birth, and its certain evidence—it is characteristic of all who belong to the “household of faith.” “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.” “Every one that loveth Him that begat, loveth Him also that is begotten of Him.”*

In maintaining the communion of saints, we unite with fellow-believers *in acts of joint worship*. We pray with and for one another; and in united prayers and praises, we come to the Father of mercies, and receive blessings that we mutually

need from the throne of the Eternal. We sympathise with each other in *all evil things*—in afflictions, in temptations, in conflicts; and we willingly share with one another *whatever good things* we possess. We bear each other's burdens, impart to the necessities of brethren. Of earthly goods which we possess, we are ready to communicate to those who are in want, and whatever spiritual gifts and blessings we have received, we regard as conferred upon us, that we may use them for the edification and comfort of all who are gathered with us into the same family of faith. "*If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it.*" The invitation of Moses to his brother-in-law, when he sought that he would accompany Israel in their journeyings in the wilderness, expresses the spirit cherished by every real believer towards all that he would desire to see enrolled in the same holy fellowship. It implies, moreover, a full obligation to perform the offices of fraternal communion, by sharing with them all blessings which himself enjoys. "Come thou with us, and we will do thee good, for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel. It shall come to pass, yea, it shall come to pass that what goodness the Lord will do unto us, the same shall we do unto thee."*

Such and so excellent being the communion of saints, it must be of high importance to realize and cultivate it, whether we have regard to our own best interests, or would promote the interests of Christ's Church in the earth. There are *means* divinely prescribed for this purpose, and, by duly attending

* Numbers x. 29, 32.

upon them, we obtain for ourselves eminent privileges, and contribute, besides, to the benefit of the whole Christian community, and of each separate individual member. The social principle—an original part of our constitution, is refined and elevated by the grace of the gospel. True religion draws it forth to its noblest efforts, and renders it influential of unspeakable good to the human family. The fellowship of believers in Christ is the most exalted exemplification of the social principle on earth, the nearest step to that heavenly communion which the redeemed shall enjoy with the Redeemer, and with all holy beings throughout eternity.

All the ordinances of our holy religion are adapted to promote this fellowship. Even in the private study of the Divine word, and in meditation and secret prayer, the believer unites with many others, who are deriving light and nourishment from the Scriptures, and who, in sincerity and truth, call upon the Lord, both theirs and ours. In the retirement of the closet, when we pour out our hearts in prayer, we say, “*Our* Father which art in heaven”—thus addressing God as persons belonging to the one family of faith, and praying with and for others. When we have no opportunity of personal intercourse with fellow-saints, we yet maintain communion with them in spirit; and we feel that we are not only one with them in Christ the Head, but also that we can meet with them frequently at the Mercy-seat. In the public ordinances of religion, and especially at the Lord’s Table, and in maintaining a joint testimony for precious truths amidst privations and trials, we enjoy valuable means for cultivating holy fellowship. In hearing the words of

eternal life, and in public prayer and praise, we are strengthened and encouraged by the presence of fellow-travellers to Mount Zion. While we feed on the provision of our Father's house, and unite in the same devotional exercises, holy affections are enkindled. We rise above fears, enemies, and discouragements, and go on our way rejoicing. In the Lord's Supper, by a beautiful and appropriate symbol, participants hand the sacramental elements to one another, thus sharing, in the language of action, the blessed spiritual provision of the feast, and exemplifying, in the most expressive manner, the endearing communion of saints. "*We being many, are one bread and one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread.*"* As witnesses for important and despised truths—called to vigorous and united effort—exposed to common and often severe privations and trials—and engaged to mutual co-operation and sympathy, we are peculiarly required to feel and act as a band of brothers. Like the primitive Christians, we should, "with one heart and mind, strive together for the faith of the gospel;" and as feeling the obligation of the solemn engagement expressed in one of the federal deeds of our Presbyterian forefathers, we should account whatever of injury is done to the least of the brethren, "as done to all universally, and to every one in particular."†

There are, moreover, various *occasional ways* of promoting the interchange of Christian affection and friendship. The saints take sweet counsel together in going to the house of God in company—they meet sometimes in worldly affairs—and they mingle

* 1 Corinthians x. 17.

† Solemn League and Covenant.

together in the delightful intercourse of family scenes. Their interest and happiness are alike to improve such interviews—by recognizing their relation to the same Father, and their connexion with the one family that in heaven and earth is named after Christ. Besides the joy of seeing each other in the flesh, and exchanging passing words of love and comfort, they should aim to give expression to communion of hearts, by engaging directly in spiritual converse—by exhorting and comforting one another daily—and by joining, ere they separate, in the hallowed exercises of united supplication and thanksgiving.

Seasons of affliction are often a means of exciting to acts of Christian fellowship, as they serve to test its sincerity, and to exhibit its excellency. Sympathy in sickness and distress—the fervent prayers uttered at the bed of disease—the help administered in privation and suffering, and the tears mingled with the bereaved—exemplify the mind of Him who is a “Brother born for adversity,” and who in all the affliction of his people is afflicted.* Such feelings and acts express what is peculiar to saints alone, and what to tried ones is found not only a seasonable relief, but, at the same time, one of the highest and most valued privileges. Even when death has made a breach in the circle of endeared friendship, the communion of saints will be manifested in appropriate acts. Our Lord declared the relation between Himself, and disciples still living, and Lazarus who had been removed, to be undissolved by death, when He said, “*Our friend Lazarus sleepeth;*” and when, in company with the

* Isaiah lxiii. 9.

Twelve, he went to administer strong consolation to the bereaved family. He evinced, moreover, how consoling and blessed is the intercourse of saints with one another and with their exalted Lord, in times of sorrow and distress. When John the Baptist was taken away by a violent death, his attached disciples took up his body and buried it, and went and told Jesus—thus exhibiting their joint participation in trial, and their united application to the Source of all support and consolation. And when the proto-martyr Stephen became the victim of persecution, it is recorded that “devout men carried him to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.”* Primitive believers not only testified thus their regard to the memory of a faithful confessor, but, at the same time, gave expression to the feelings of holy fellowship, which death is unable to extinguish, and to hopes which look forward to joyful re-union beyond the grave.

While, in these various ways, the fellowship of saints is manifested and maintained, and many of its hallowed benefits are enjoyed, there is need of a *special religious institution*, in which believers may be drawn together at stated times in the closest intercourse—in which the eminent advantages of fraternal association may be fully realized. It is not enough that the communion of the faithful be secret and invisible, though this is frequently felt to be a precious privilege in relation to fellow-saints with whom we can seldom meet together, or whom we may never see on earth. Nor does it accomplish all the purposes of saintly communion to have only

* Acts viii. 2.

occasional interviews with fellow-disciples, or to unite with them in ordinances, in which, from the nature of the case, there cannot be free interchange of Christian sentiment and affection—in which there is no place for mutual exhortation, the reciprocation of cordial brotherly affection, and united special prayer.

The institution of **SELECT FELLOWSHIP MEETINGS**, in which Christian brethren voluntarily and regularly associate for social prayer and spiritual converse on Divine things, supplies a channel for the exercise and expression of gracious social affections, and a means for cultivating the communion of saints, which is admirably adapted for subserving these important ends, and without which they will be but rarely and imperfectly attained. Such an ordinance seems to be required, to answer a special design of Christian association on earth, and without it the provision of religious ordinances would appear to be incomplete. The Church fully organized is represented as composed of living members, who speak the truth in love, and grow up as a body conformed in all things to Christ, the glorious Head. • “From whom the whole body, fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in love.”* By secret prayer, and the private study of the word, we hold communion as individuals with the Father of our spirits, and receive blessings from the Throne for ourselves and others. In the sweet exercises of

* Ephesians iv. 15, 16.

family religion, we dedicate our households to God, and have domestic relations and scenes hallowed, through the favour of Him who condescends to take the endearing title of the "God of all the families of Israel." In the public fellowship of the Church, through the services of the Sanctuary, in hearing the word, and partaking of the sacraments, we associate with all that call upon the name of the Lord; we advance the Divine glory throughout the earth; and obtain for ourselves and others blessings that descend like the dew upon the hill of Zion. But in none of these ordinances is the opportunity fully furnished which members of the same spiritual family, and fellow-travellers to the same blessed home and country must always desire—of imparting to each other their feelings and views of the exalted Master whom they love—of the holy privileges to which they have been called—and of communicating their mutual trials and joys—their fears and blissful hopes.

The freest interchange of spiritual sentiment and affection, it is true, is provided in the domestic constitution, but this is confined to those who are united by the ties of natural kindred, or who are gathered together under the same roof. The private fellowship-meeting provides for intimate Christian intercourse of a more extensive kind. Akin to the domestic communion in freedom and tenderness, it yet embraces a wider range, and receives as brethren in Christ those who are of the family of God, and such as, united in a common profession of faith, are fellow-travellers to the land of inheritance. More select than the fellowship of joint worship in the sanctuary, it realizes more directly

the great doctrine of *the Christian priesthood*, and admits those who join in this association to offer in company sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving, and to impart to each other the views and affections of their hearts, and their mutual privileges, sorrows, and hopes. The private social meeting aims to unite, in the most endearing manner, those who are of one heart and mind in relation to Christ Jesus the Lord, and the great things of his glory and salvation. As He himself said on a memorable occasion, pointing to his disciples, so say those again who unite with others in fellowship for prayer and mutual edification—"Behold my mother and my brethren! for whosoever will do the will of my Father in heaven, the same is my sister, and mother, and brother."* The private social meeting, though select, is not necessarily limited in extent. Though it may be proper that a comparatively small number in one locality should statedly meet together for social religious exercises, yet such associations may be multiplied, so as to embrace all the members of a religious community, and so as ultimately to comprehend the whole visible Church of Christ. As so many centres of light and spiritual influence, fellowship prayer-meetings may diffuse abroad the savour of the Redeemer's name, so as to fill the visible Church with the "fragrance of his good ointments," and to spread throughout the world his renowned fame. Like the primitive Christians in Jerusalem after the Pentecostal shower of the Spirit, the days shall yet come to Zion when believers in every land shall frequently assemble in

* Matthew xii. 50.

different places to call on the name of the Lord—to cultivate the most endeared intercourse—or, according to the Sacred Record, to “continue in fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” Then shall the departed glory again dwell in the land. Through the blessing upon a united and devoted Church, the Saviour’s name shall be “great among the Gentiles, from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same, and in every place incense and a pure offering shall be offered to his name.”

CHAPTER II.

INSTITUTION AND NATURE OF FELLOWSHIP MEETINGS—OBLIGATIONS TO THEIR OBSERVANCE.

THE Fellowship Prayer Meeting is an association of Christian brethren for joint religious worship, and mutual edification, by means of spiritual converse. It is *private*, as distinguished from the public ordinances of the Sanctuary—and *select*, as consisting of such as are one in their profession of faith and are united in Christian affection, and a becoming godly practice.

This Institution can certainly plead a Divine warrant. Yet it is admitted that it is not prescribed in the word, in the same manner as some other religious ordinances—such as the Sabbath, the preaching of the word, and the Sacraments—Baptism and the Lord's Supper. These are institutions properly *positive*, and they are therefore of positive prescription. There are other duties, which are either so plain, or which flow so directly and immediately from the relations in which individuals are placed, that, in the word of God, they are rather assumed than commanded. Such are those of Family Worship, and those connected with various domestic and other social relations. These are objects of frequent allusion, and are subjected to specific regulation in the Sacred Word:—but they are not in express terms

commanded. It need not therefore be thought strange that we may not be able to adduce from Scripture any formal or explicit injunction for stated social worship. We have no express precept for prayer as connected with the preaching of the word—or for separation for humiliation and confession of sin, as preparatory to the observance of the Lord's Supper; and yet these religious exercises are certainly sanctioned by the general scope of the Scriptures. The pious sentiment and feeling of good men have always called for such exercises—and they have been authorized by the almost universal practice of the Church.

The class of duties to which we refer, is of the kind which Theologians designate *moral natural*—that is, they originate from our relation, as moral and accountable beings to God, and to one another as subjects of his moral government, and as joint partakers of gracious privileges. They do not therefore require positive prescription;—but yet their obligation is as fully confirmed by the requirements and examples of the word, as that of those which are expressly enjoined. It may be alleged that the social prayer meeting is only of *occasional* obligation, and that as its observance is voluntary, so attendance upon it may be neglected by Christians without blame. Still it will be granted that there are many occasions—and these will appear more numerous, the more solemnly the matter is considered—in which Christians have the opportunity and call to associate thus together, and in which the example of the saints has strongly recommended this exercise. If the duties which Christians owe to one another are left to casual or occasional inter-

course, their performance will be either unduly delayed, or altogether omitted: and the mournful consequence will be—what is frequently observable—they will either cease to be acknowledged as duties, or the sense of their value and importance will be greatly diminished. It is only *the stated observance* of social prayer that provides for duties which we owe to fellow-saints being properly performed; and in this way alone, can we reap the great and manifold benefits of Christian intercourse.

The duties of the social prayer meeting, like others of our holy religion, should be a *free-will offering*; but it is not therefore a matter of indifference whether we perform them or not. If the time and manner of their observance is not matter of distinct specification, and they are thus of a more voluntary character than some other religious duties, still this does not weaken the reasons for their performance, or render it optional. The duties which moralists have termed *duties of imperfect obligation* form the highest test of Christian character; and their voluntary and ready performance furnishes the most marked evidence of the existence and power of gracious principles.* So private religious fellowship, though a voluntary service, is of the most weighty obligation, and its diligent cultivation will evidence the ascendancy of Christian love,—the eminent power of grace, and the prevalence of a desire to glorify God, and to do good to all men, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

Prayer has been well styled “The breath of the

* See Chalmers's Institutes of Theology.—Vol. I.

new creature." Wherever the grace of prayer has been imparted, it will flow forth in appropriate acts. We are irresistibly impelled to pray for those whom we love; and, as we have opportunity, to pray *with* them. We cannot but delight in their company too, and desire to converse with them on matters on which the heart strongly feels, or which are matters of common interest. Prayer and spiritual converse are, in their very nature, social exercises. On this principle, Church-assemblies convene for united devotions; and hence, too, select societies gather together for joint supplication, and loving and sympathizing intercourse.

Were two or three persons cast together on a desolate island, if they were partakers of grace, they would be drawn to pray together. Hence originated domestic worship, and such, too, is the spring of social prayer and spiritual converse. It is the beautiful and just conception of Milton, that when there were but two holy human beings on earth, their fellowship was sanctified and elevated by acts of united adoration. This was the domestic worship of paradise; and though Adam and Eve were united in the most endearing ties of kindred, the case would not have been different had they had intercourse only as fellow-saints, without the bonds of earthly relationship. Their service had then been that of social private prayer, but their converse had been alike spiritual, and their devotions the same outflowings of humble and grateful hearts.

"Soon as they forth were come to open sight
Of dayspring and the sun, who, scarce uprisen
With wheels yet hovering o'er the crimson brim,
Shot parallel to the earth his dewy ray,

Discovering in wide landscape all the East,
 Of Paradise and Eden's happy plains,
 Lowly they bowed adoring, and began
 Their orisons, each morning duly paid
 In various style ; for neither various style
 Nor holy rapture wanted they to praise
 Their Maker, in fit strains pronounced, or sung
 Unmeditated ; such prompt eloquence
 Flowed from their lips, in prose or numerous verse,
 More tuneable than needed lute or harp
 To add more sweetness ; and they thus began." *

The FELLOWSHIP PRAYER MEETING is sanctioned,
 1. BY THE LAW OF NATURE.

The observance of this institution is accordant with right reason. The social principle is an essential part of our constitution as human beings ; and its proper exercise in various relations is directed, as well by the universal desire of happiness as by regard to mutual interests and enjoyments. Man was not formed for solitary existence, and even in paradise, God Himself declared that it was not good to be alone. The desire of society, and the expectation of deriving from it pleasure and benefit, physical, intellectual, and moral, are among the most general and extensively prevalent of the fundamental emotions of our nature. The universal practice of mankind exhibits this original sentiment, and manifests the power of this original law. The principle of association is everywhere resorted to by men of kindred sentiments and similar pursuits, to promote individual improvement and to attain common valuable objects. Human society has been greatly benefited by the proper exercise of this principle ; and while it must be admitted that it has been, in a variety of cases, perverted and abused for

* Paradise Lost—B. v., ver. 138.

effecting purposes mischievous and destructive, there can be no doubt that manifold improvement and advancement too have been the result of union and co-operation, in the pursuit of laudable undertakings. In modern times, the power of association has been all but universally confessed. In all departments of human labour, it has been resorted to, in order to effect ends that are deemed valuable. Civilization has thus been promoted; and the recent rapid advancement of society in knowledge, physical comfort, and the peaceful arts, is justly ascribed to the circumstance, that those who seek to promote improvements, betake themselves to mutual counsel and combination to accomplish their purpose.

The gracious renovation of our nature does not abolish any of our original instincts. On the contrary, it refines and elevates them, and powerfully directs them to the acquisition of ends that are worthy or honourable. Revelation declares that "*Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labour.*"* It illustrates the impulsive strength of association by a striking and expressive similitude—"Iron sharpeneth iron, so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend."† The children of God are called to recognize the power and benefit of a principle so fundamental and so universally adopted. It is certainly capable of being applied with superior effect to the advancement of true religion throughout the earth, and for the promotion of the interests of practical godliness. If others avail themselves of social intercourse and

* Eccles. iv. 9.

† Proverbs xxvii. 17.

co-operation to compass ends secular and temporary, much more should Christians aim, by fraternal counsel and holy fellowship, to realize objects of eternal moment. To neglect the employment of such a means of success in religion is to violate a principle of our nature, as well as a transgression of a first law of the renewed soul. To call it into frequent requisition is, on the other hand, to adopt an instrument the most suitable and potent, for attaining the high and important ends of the heavenly calling. The conduct of men of the world reproves those who neglect select Christian fellowship. It is irrational to expect important spiritual results from individual, insulated efforts. The children of this world never act thus in the pursuit of mere earthly objects. Let it not be the reproach of professed Christians that, in this respect, "the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light." By assembling ourselves together—by mutual combination and co-operation, we should show the excellency of the wisdom that comes from above—while we evidence that religion is a "reasonable service," and that, in proportion to the importance and magnitude of the pursuit, we are ready to avail ourselves of every proper means for its attainment.

2. Such intimate Fellowship, as the private social prayer meeting supplies, results from **THE NEW STATE AND RELATION INTO WHICH GOD'S PEOPLE HAVE BEEN INTRODUCED.**

By grace, believers are separated from the world lying in wickedness, and are incorporated into one body under Christ the glorious Head. They are, as individuals, "brands plucked out of the burning"—

redeemed, pardoned, and saved ones. By the great change effected in their state, they are not left solitary individuals; they are united in social ties, and their characters are exhibited and developed in various relations, demanding the performance of relative duties. When pardoned and justified, the saints are, at the same time, adopted into the family of God. While they thus become children of the same heavenly Father, they are at the same time enrolled in "the household of faith," and constituted a holy brotherhood. This implies that they cherish mutual tender love, and that they are thenceforth distinguished by endeared intercourse, sympathy, and mutual support. Those features of the redeemed family, they cannot exhibit in a state of distance, separation, and estrangedness: they require for their manifestation to associate frequently in terms of intimate friendship. The sacred writers delight to describe the saints by terms and phrases, which obviously imply special fellowship, and which would be devoid of any proper meaning, if those to whom they are applied, did not recognize their real union, and perform offices of love. They are "fellow-servants" of one glorious Master—employed in the same service, and looking forward to the same blessed "recompense of reward"—and they are, in consequence, bound to co-operation, and to sharing in common labours and difficulties. They are "fellow-soldiers," and have thus to encounter common enemies, while they fight under one glorious Captain of salvation, and are ranged under the same displayed banner. They are therefore peculiarly fitted to assist and animate one another in the spiritual warfare. Pledged to their Leader by a sacra-

mental vow, they are likewise pledged to stand true to each other in conflict and trial—to take frequent counsel together respecting the plans of the enemy, and concerning measures for mutual safety and deliverance—and to continue united in trial, defeat, and in the assured hope of ultimate victory.

Believers are, moreover, declared to be “fellow-citizens,” and “joint-heirs” of a glorious inheritance; and such they cannot possibly be, without delighting in the city of God, and seeking earnestly the good of Jerusalem. Nor can they realize the blessed privilege of heirship, without conferring together concerning the portion of the saints—the heritage of Israel. Theirs is an estate in reversion—partly to be enjoyed here, but by far the largest portion lying beyond the Jordan. While they go forward to “a city of habitation,” and seek a better country, even an heavenly, by familiar and holy intercourse, they lessen the difficulties of the way—they confirm each other in one blessed hope—their “conversation is in heaven,” and they anticipate with lively delight, the exalted social enjoyments of their Father’s house in heaven.

Pleasures are enhanced and heightened by being shared with those whom we love; and by Christian fellowship too, labours and toils are lessened and difficulties surmounted. And there is joy in the prospect, as there will be “fulness of joy” in the possession of the common inheritance of the redeemed for ever. How wonderfully near and endeared is the union of the saints! They are one body under one vital Head, and they are at the same time “members one of another.” They have the same interests, labours, fears, conflicts, and hopes.

Their mutual duties are the duties which brethren of the same family—fellow-servants and soldiers—fellow-pilgrims, citizens, and heirs owe to one another. Their high aims and prospects are the same; and their real interests for time and eternity, from the day of their holy calling till the close of their earthly pilgrimage, are incapable of disunion or separation. To effect these gracious designs—to subserve these most important purposes, Christians require to meet and speak often one to another. In select societies for united prayer, and joint counsel, they exhibit their fraternal character, and discharge the duties of spiritual fellowship; and, in these associations, too, they experience how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.

3. THERE ARE SOLEMN DUTIES ENJOINED UPON CHRISTIANS WHICH CANNOT be properly performed, without their associating together for distinctive and select fellowship.

The incorporation of Christians into one body—their introduction into the same family—certainly implies that they owe special duties to one another. Our holy religion is diametrically opposed to all selfishness. Love—active, fruitful, and persevering love is its grand element; and this must of necessity prompt to exertions to promote the welfare of its object. A leading precept of Christianity is “OWE NO MAN ANYTHING, BUT TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER.” While we are bound to do good to all men as we have opportunity, there is a *speciality* in our beneficence towards “the household of faith.” The motto of our whole Christian conduct should ever be—“*None of us liveth to himself, and no*

man dieth to himself." Called as disciples of Christ to be benefactors of the world, we have a peculiar relation to fellow-believers, and to them we owe manifold important duties. In the Word of God these are distinctly enumerated, and their performance is enforced by motives the most persuasive and endearing. The precepts enjoining these duties suppose an intimate fellowship existing among the parties to whom they are addressed; and it is only by cultivating familiar intercourse and spiritual converse that they can be properly obeyed. Christians are commanded to "love one another"—to be "kindly affectioned one to another." They are to "consider one another"—to "teach," "admonish," and "exhort" each other. They are to bear each other's burdens—to confess their faults one to another—to forbear, forgive, and comfort each other—and to provoke one another to love and good works. They are required to exhort one another daily—to pray for one another. In the spirit of genuine humility, and paternal esteem and affection, they are in honour to prefer one another; and according as every man has received the gift, even so they are to "minister the same one to the other."

In their intercourse, fellow-professors are to study mutual edification—to strengthen the feeble-minded, and encourage the weak; and they are to teach and admonish one another, "speaking in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs." It is evident that these, and other duties of a similar kind, which are enjoined in the Bible, cannot be fully performed in private; nor are public ordinances alone a suitable sphere for their exercise. True religion certainly

delights in privacy; and the experience of the heart is best cultivated in the retirement of the closet. We may, therefore, call in question the reality of that species of religion which lives only in the excitements and sympathies of public assemblies. But it must ever be held, at the same time, that genuine religious principle and feeling cannot be *confined* to the heart and the closet. They must come forth in embodied action, and pervade the whole life. They must diffuse around an influence upon others; and, like the "alabaster box" of ointment, broken and shed upon the Saviour's head, their fragrance will fill the whole house. It has been appositely said, that "single coals die out; when drawn together they break into a flame." The Christian spirit, diligently cherished and assiduously cultivated in secret, will evidence its existence and power when we come in contact with fellow-Christians; and it cannot but desire and delight in such intercourse as affords it free and full scope and expansion. This intercourse cannot be casual or infrequent, if either the offices of Christian love be duly discharged, or the important duties to which we have referred be properly performed.

Judiciously has it been remarked by an able American author*—"Love, which is the great manifestation of grace, is too communicable in its nature to be always pent up. The electric current will pervade all whose hands are joined in the domestic circle; and it may be affirmed, with equal truth, all who are united in the *Fellowship Meeting*." They will feel together, read God's word to-

* Rev. James W. Alexander, D.D.—"Thoughts on Family Worship," in "Christian's Fireside Library," p. 206.

gether, sing together, and pray together; and it is indispensable that there should be some established mode of cherishing and exciting this fellowship of experience." Mutual exhortation and confession of faults, and fraternal admonition can neither be attended to in private nor in the great congregation; nor can such duties, either in their spirit or outward observance, be performed aright, if Christian intercourse be only casual or occasional. Select, stated associations, and regular opportunities of meeting for united prayer and familiar spiritual converse are evidently necessary, if the inspired directions are to be duly carried into effect, and if so important and beneficial a part of Christian practice is to be exhibited.

It may be easily shown, moreover, that other great duties, which are among the Church's primary functions, require such association for private fellowship. Efforts for the diffusion of the Scriptures—for the instruction of the ignorant and neglected in Christian lands, and for the evangelization of the nations, are now generally admitted to be best made by societies organized for such objects. It may be questioned, however, whether injury has not been done to this great cause by regarding such societies as merely *optional*, and not in the highest sense obligatory, and also by embracing in their membership those who entertain very different sentiments on fundamental articles of Christian faith, or whose religious practice is diverse. Certain it is, that the results of modern missionary exertions have not been equal to the experience of primitive times; and there is a reason for this. Is there not ground to apprehend that the Church has been chargeable with a

dereliction of duty in the organization which has been resorted to for carrying out her benevolent designs; and that there has been too little private and social prayer for that spiritual influence, without which all human agency will be of no avail? The select fellowship of Christians, instinct with spiritual life and ardour—"of one heart and mind"—would approve itself as the most suitable for bringing others to the knowledge of the truth, and for spreading the Redeemer's renowned fame. Such was undoubtedly the organization of the primitive Christian Church, when every bosom glowed with missionary zeal, and when the gospel spread with extraordinary rapidity, and the Cross achieved its noblest triumphs. A return to a similar organization would hasten forward the subjugation of the nations to Immanuel's sceptre. The stated Fellowship Meeting is the best machinery for evangelistic efforts at home and abroad. It is fitted to be at once a happy means of revival in the Church, a Bible association, a missionary institute, and a confederation for making aggressive efforts against darkness and ungodliness wherever they prevail. It draws together those who are one in principle and in spiritual affection. Being select, and limited to a small number, meeting frequently in one place, it supplies the best means of leading all Christians to put forth active exertions in behalf of the truth, and of assigning a division of labour to the agency employed. There is, besides, afforded the opportunity of "reporting progress" frequently, and of adapting plans and efforts to existing circumstances, so as to secure the desired result. The power of *united prayer* is, moreover, not

among the least of the advantages enjoyed; and by it is afforded the cheering and certain prospect of promised success. The encouraging assurance of the Saviour, "*if any two of you agree on earth to ask my Father in heaven, it shall be done unto you,*" surely warrants us to expect that when brethren intimately known to each other, of one mind, and assembled for frequent earnest prayer, shall engage in the work, a success hitherto unexampled shall follow their labours.

4. The institution of private fellowship meetings can plead **DIVINE APPOINTMENT AND APPROVAL.**

From the views which have been advanced, it may be readily inferred that an ordinance for the special maintenance of Christian fellowship has been provided. The dictates of nature point to it; the wants and cravings of the renewed heart require select and confidential fellowship, to afford them satisfaction; and the duties which Christians owe to one another indispensably demand such an institution for their due performance. We have, besides, more than mere inference, however legitimate, in behalf of stated associations for united prayer and spiritual intercourse. The King of Zion, who alone has the supreme and sovereign right to establish ordinances of worship, has expressly appointed this institution. His revealed will declares, in terms at once striking and comprehensive, His high sanction and approval of the practice.

Thus under the Old Testament, in a time of gracious revival, the inhabitants of one city are represented as calling those of another to united prayer—"Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord, and

to seek the Lord of hosts. I will go also.”* At a subsequent important period of the history of God’s ancient Church, the “fearers of the Lord” are distinguished by speaking often one to another, so that the exalted Master whom they served was an approving listener; and He guarantees to them a high and honourable recompense of reward. What could more impressively declare the importance and excellence of the exercise of private social fellowship? What could be a higher encouragement to engage in it with interest, and to persevere in its observance?

The change of the dispensation has in no respect weakened the sanction for social and private associations for prayer and Christian fellowship. On the contrary, under the new economy, their existence is recognized, and promises of the most gracious character, and of the highest value, are connected with their observance. The Redeemer himself declares—“*Again, I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth, as touching anything that ye shall ask, it shall be done for you of my Father who is in heaven.* For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”† The comprehensive character and value of this assurance cannot be too highly estimated. It is most condescending and encouraging, and secures the enjoyment of the most eminent blessings in connexion with attendance upon this institution. The believing prayers of individual saints enter into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth, and are followed by a return of bless-

* Zechariah viii. 21.

† Matthew viii. 19, 20.

ing. But there is ampler ground to expect an answer when believers, in holy union and agreement of heart, ask their Father in heaven in conjoint prayer and supplication. Even should the members of the praying assembly be very few, they have the warrant to expect a gracious hearing and a favourable answer. The faithful and true Witness assures us that, “*If two or three agree on earth*” to ask God, they shall succeed in their suit. And then he gives them full encouragement to present all their spiritual wants in united prayer at the footstool of mercy. It is as “touching anything that they shall ask,” that the ample assurance is given — “It shall be done for them of my Father who is in heaven.” Who with such abundant encouragement would not seek this holy fellowship? What innumerable blessings for ourselves, for the Church, and the world, in reference to things of this present life, and for the world to come, might we obtain, if we associated together, and realized this holy agreement of heart and oneness of petition!

And, then, the *gracious presence* of the Redeemer is here assured to two or three who gather together in his name. This assembling together in Christ’s name is in professing his truth, and, in obedience to his will, in an institution, not of human contrivance, but of Divine appointment, for the promotion of his glory, and in dependence upon Him for acceptance and the desired blessing. What higher privilege could possibly be enjoyed than the presence of the King of saints—the great Master of assemblies, in such a meeting! Under the former economy the promise was, “*In all places where I record my name, I will come unto thee and bless*

thee;”* and the royal Psalmist rejoiced in God, loving the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob.† But, in the abundance of Gospel privileges, the gracious presence of Christ,—that which turns a wilderness into a paradise, and which, when fully enjoyed, forms the chief element of the felicity of heaven, is secured to *two* or *three* believers when met in Christ’s name, in the lowest position, and in the humblest circumstances. This delightful promise extends to small associations, consisting of the least possible number, even to two persons. Who would not earnestly desire its fulfilment? What saint of God will not eagerly seek after the meeting for united prayer and select fellowship, where the Well-Beloved has assured him of his gracious presence? The blessed Redeemer, who delights in communion with his saints, gives the promise in remarkable terms. He does not say “*I will be* in the midst of you,” but “there *am I* in the midst of them.” He reveals Himself under a Divine title. As the glorious I AM, He is present with his servants when they are gathered together for united worship. If He were not truly Divine—God Omnipotent—He could not be with thousands of praying societies, assembled at the same time in different parts of the earth, nor could He confer the diversified blessings which their wants and circumstances require. In terms of this condescending assurance, He intimates that wherever a few devout worshippers assemble to call upon his name, they shall be introduced into the presence-chamber.

* Exodus xx. 24.

† Psalm lxxxvii. 4.

God Himself will be with them, ready to hear, merciful to pardon, almighty to deliver and save, and having inexhaustible fulness to supply abundantly every possible want. The promise is unconditional; and, as it is expressed in the present tense, it implies that the gracious One who utters it is ready to receive and bless all who come to Him—infinitely willing to grant them the most familiar intercourse. If the Saviour be thus in the midst of two or three gathered together in his name, shall we not, both in regard to His honour and for our own unspeakable advantage, earnestly desire this fellowship? If we really love Him, how can we keep away from the place where His company may certainly be expected? If we value His gracious presence, shall we not repair to the ordinance in which He engages that it will without fail be conferred?*

5. The Private Fellowship Meeting is sanctioned by *numerous beautiful Scriptural examples*.

Approved examples of God's people assembling together for communion in devotion are everywhere presented in an attractive manner in the Sacred

* An aged pious female was a member of a prayer-meeting, which was once numerous, and she continued to attend diligently when others had become indifferent, and had forsaken the assembling of themselves together. On one occasion, she went to the place of assembly and remained the usual time, when no other person was present. A person who was aware of the circumstance inquired at her—"What company she had?" The characteristic reply was—"The best of company. I had God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost present; and what is more, they assured me that they would meet with me again, the next night of meeting, and, whoever will be absent, I purpose to keep the appointment." This pious answer being told to the members who had fallen off, became the means of awakening them, and of exciting anew the desire after Christian fellowship. The prayer-meeting again became an object of attraction, and was attended with a revived devotional spirit.

Word. They occur in the earliest part of the Inspired Record, and are to be met with till the close of revelation. The spiritual instincts of the renewed have been followed by believers in all ages; and in their holy association God has been honoured, and they themselves have enjoyed manifold blessings. When true religion was set up in the world, after the Fall, it assumed the form of private social fellowship. In the days of Enoch, when the people of God made a distinct separation from the apostate descendants of Cain, it is said “**THEN BEGAN MEN TO CALL UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD.**”^{*} Whether we read this as in the received version, or as in the margin—“*Then began men to call themselves by the name of the Lord*”—it shows that the professors of true religion, at that early period, united together for prayer and spiritual fellowship. A public ministry was not appointed till many ages after; and we are not told of edifices having been erected for public worship. Notwithstanding, the servants of God recognize the duty and privilege of associating for united devotion. They were known from others as God’s peculiar people. They called on the name of the Lord unitedly as well as individually. This was their honourable distinction and character; and thus were they preserved through many generations from the general corruption that speedily overspread the earth.

The family of Noah in the Ark, and those of his sons, doubtless associated for united prayer and spiritual converse. In the singular and solemn position in which they were placed, when the Flood was

^{*} Genesis iv. 26.

upon the face of the earth—miraculously preserved amidst the ruins of a world destroyed—“They spake often one to another,” and the Lord hearkened, and remembered them in mercy. The first service they performed when they came forth out of the Ark—when Noah built an altar, and offered thereon a sacrifice, was one of social devotion, testifying their gratitude, and seeking blessings for the future—while, in accepting it, God declared his gracious approval of the service.

The patriarchal worship was not only domestic, it was, likewise, select and social. The father of the family was king and priest of the household. At the same time, in many instances, he presided over numerous dependents, some of whom, as Eleazer in Abraham's family, and Deborah in Jacob's, were truly pious, and associated with the family in joint acts of religious service. Hence was it that the patriarchs, in their frequent sojournings, erected altars, and called them by significant names. These were not only designed to be a standing testimony against the surrounding idolatry, and a witness in behalf of true religion, but also a means of renewed dedication to those who were gathered into the household, and of obtaining for them promised covenant blessings. In the Book of Psalms, which has been appropriately styled “The Bible of believing experience,” there are frequent distinct allusions to private religious intercourse as characteristic of the people of God. The Psalmist, speaking as a believer, says—“*I am companion of them that fear thee;*” and elsewhere, he notices with interest, fellow-travellers to Zion, “*taking sweet counsel together, and going into the house*

*of God in company.** The captives by “the rivers of Babylon” are represented as together suspending their harps upon the willows, and weeping while they “remembered Zion.”† Daniel and his companions, when placed in peril of life, conferred together, and, in united prayer, desired “mercies of the God of heaven.”‡ Their joint supplications were heard, and not only were they themselves preserved, and made the instruments of preserving others from destruction, but the discoveries which were communicated to them were rendered singularly subservient to the advancement of the Divine glory, and of the cause of true religion. In the days of Malachi, as we have seen, “the fearers of the Lord” were distinguished from a declining and ungodly generation by associating for private religious fellowship, and were honoured with special approval and the assurance of eminent blessing.

Under the increased light and privileges of the New Economy, the institution of select prayerful fellowship is recommended and enforced by the most impressive and attractive examples. Our Lord himself is presented as our ever bright and blessed Model; and He who guarantees to all succeeding generations his gracious presence to two or three assembled in his name, showed, while He tabernacled on earth, his special delight in private fellowship with his disciples. As He went in and out, with them, some of the most tender and affecting manifestations of his glory were made in connexion with retired assemblies for private intercourse and communion. Thus, the memorable interview on the

* Psalm cxix. 60; lv. 14. † Ps. cxxxvii. 2. ‡ Daniel ii. 17.

Mount of transfiguration was of the nature of a *select prayer-meeting*. When celestial visitants conversed with the three favoured disciples, and the Great Master of assemblies was there, the Evangelist specially records that it was "*as he prayed*," He was transfigured, and his raiment became "white and glistening." This memorable display of the Redeemer's glory, so affecting as preparatory to his deep abasement shortly to follow, so fraught with important significance to all future ages, was made to a private social meeting. What a powerful recommendation is thus given to the continual observance of such an institution! It is, moreover, observable that when our Lord, during his public ministry, was employed in preaching and working miracles, He frequently led his disciples into scenes of retired fellowship; and that He chose such private intercourse for imparting to them more fully his mind, and for communicating to them the meaning and design of his instructions. Thus He dealt with them as a considerate and compassionate parent with his children. The tender emotions of his heart gushed forth, and the combined graces of his character appeared in the most attractive lustre. On one occasion he addressed his disciples — "*Come ye yourselves into a desert place, and rest awhile*."* Thus He spoke as knowing their frame, declaring his desire to open his breast to them unreservedly, and intimating the necessity to them of more private intercourse than they could enjoy in attending upon his public ministrations. Frequently is He said in the Gospels to reserve the

* Mark vi. 31.

unfolding of the meaning of the parables which He spoke, to this private fellowship.* The disciples looked with desire to this retired, select fellowship, to have their darkness removed, and their doubts solved; and with peculiar readiness and condescending familiarity, our Lord met, and even anticipated their desires. "When they were alone he expounded all things to his disciples." In the presence of the multitudes, He made the most wonderful displays of his power and Godhead, and He spoke as never man spake. But it was in the retired meeting for private fellowship with his disciples that He delighted to unfold to them all his heart, and to discover to them his unspeakable tenderness. Thus does the Redeemer yet honour the private fellowship meeting. Even in glory, He remembers the scenes of intercourse with his people while on earth, and his delights are still with the sons of men. While He blesses the proclamation of his truth, and honours the public ordinances of Zion, his servants that desire to know his will obtain, in social fellowship, more familiar intercourse with the Beloved. Their doubts are resolved, their fears dispelled. They experience the sweetness of the word in plain and personal application—the "secret of the Lord" is with them, and He shows them his covenant.

It is observable that instances of the largest outflowings of the Redeemer's spirit were in scenes of such private fellowship. Thus, when He expressed what has been appropriately termed "The Rest and Repose" of his holy soul, it was upon an occasion

* See Mat. xiii. 36. Mark ix. 28; xiii. 3, 4; iv. 34.

of this kind—Luke x. 21—23. He entered also upon his embittered agony in the fellowship of a few chosen followers; and the inspired narrative plainly intimates that, in the same place, He had frequently had communion with his disciples. The traitor knew where to find Him, for “Jesus often resorted thither with his disciples.” He was to suffer alone, and neither man nor angel could share with him his unspeakable sorrows, or the glory of his victory. But He desired support and comfort in the immediate prospect of his agony from private fellowship with disciples whom he loved, and to this He clung even to the moment that the fearful command was to be executed—“Smite the Shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.” “With desire,” said he, “have I desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer.”* What a powerful motive is thus presented for us too to desire fellowship with the saints, and to resort to places and scenes of prayer and spiritual intercourse with them, even when exposed to trials, or when entering upon severe conflicts and sufferings!

After our Lord's resurrection, and on the establishment of the New Testament economy, his example and that of his saints exhibit, in a remarkable manner, the blessing from above resting upon assemblies for private social worship. In the evening of the day of his resurrection, when his disciples were assembled in an upper room, the Redeemer came into the midst, and said, “*Peace be unto you,*” and He confirmed and encouraged them as “*He showed them his hands and his side.*”

* Luke xxii. 15.

Eight days after, when they were again convened for united worship, He appeared among them, dispelled the unbelief of Thomas, and displayed in the most affecting manner, his Divine condescension and glory. The disciples were commanded, at his ascension, to tarry at Jerusalem, and wait the promise of the Spirit. For ten days they continued in united prayer and spiritual converse; and, as the blessing vouchsafed for obedience, and in answer to prayer, the Spirit descended like "floods upon the dry ground," on the day of Pentecost. This was the commencement of the New Economy—the begun "ministration of the Spirit;" and it deserves to be remarked, that it stands in immediate connexion with the exercises of a select private fellowship meeting.

In the inspired history of the book of Acts, we have several lovely instances of attendance on this institution, and of the blessed effects flowing from its observance. There seems to us to be no doubt that for a time after the memorable effusion of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the multitude of the disciples thus principally cultivated holy fellowship. They could not assemble for public worship in one place, or even in several; and neither could they command at once accommodation for public ministrations, nor would their enemies, who had all authority in their hands, have permitted such assemblies. But they "continued in prayer and in fellowship" by fraternal intercourse, from house to house: and the body of believers edified itself in love, by daily intercourse in private societies. Two instances of the blessing upon such fraternal associations occur in a subsequent part of the same inspired record,

and are striking from their connexion with the planting and trials of the primitive Church. In the persecution which followed the death of Stephen, when Peter was miraculously delivered from prison, he went to Mary's house, as to a place of well-known resort, where many were assembled praying. Connected with his singular deliverance, it is said that "*prayer was made by the church continually.*" The original word here used, has been said to denote an action continued without interruption; and it is alleged by some expositors, that this refers to different prayer-meetings being assembled at different hours at various places throughout Jerusalem. As one concluded social religious exercises, another convened; and thus united prayer was kept up without ceasing, in behalf of the Lord's servant, until he obtained deliverance. The social and earnest prayers of a suffering Church thus came up into God's Holy temple, and an immediate answer burst asunder Peter's chains, and "delivered him out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews." His repairing at once to Mary's house to a prayer meeting indicated the apostle's desire after private social fellowship with brethren, and his conviction of its excellence. It was eminently befitting, moreover, that to the assembled disciples should be thus declared the efficacy of united prayer, and that they should be encouraged in all future time, not to forsake the assembling of themselves together.

The first triumphs of the Gospel in Europe were in connexion with the private society for prayer. At Philippi, where Paul and Silas on the Sabbath-day repaired to the river side to a place "where prayer was wont to be made," the Lord "opened Lydia's

heart to attend to the things spoken of Paul." Thus the first trophy of the Saviour's grace in Europe is found in a retired assembly for prayer. There Divine light beams into her mind, and there the great work began, which was to render the quarter of the globe which we inhabit, enlightened, powerful, and free, and which was to spread the knowledge of salvation to the ends of the earth. What a scene of surpassing interest is the retired prayer-meeting by the river side at Philippi! How greatly honoured are its *female* members! What an encouragement does this instance present for ministers to associate in such an ordinance with praying people! May we not anticipate that the future glorious triumphs of the gospel will take place in a similar connexion—and that when Christians, in praying assemblies, shall agree to ask the Lord, He will then give the heathen to the Son for his inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession!

Lastly, **THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD'S SAINTS** bears ample testimony to the Divine acceptance of united prayer, and to the precious benefits of such fellowship. God has unequivocally declared in his Word that the joint prayers of his people shall be heard, and answered. He has frequently shown this in his gracious providence; and the heartfelt experience of saints has fully illustrated the truth of God's promise and divine grace displayed in its fulfilment. The two sorrowful disciples journeying to Emmaus were constrained, from the testimony of experience, to say, "*Did not our hearts burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and opened to us the Scriptures?*" So many who have

delighted in the fellowship-meeting have had the *secret witness* that the Lord was in the midst of them, and that, in the fullest sense, it was good to be there.

In these assemblies, fellow-saints have enjoyed unrestrained and loving intercourse. They have taken "sweet counsel" together. Their words of spiritual converse have ministered grace to the hearers, and have been like the best wine to the Beloved, which "goes down sweetly," "causing the lips of them that are asleep to speak." New light has been thrown upon the word, and the power of the Spirit has been present, working convictions of sin, dispelling fears and doubts, and filling the heart with joy and peace in believing. The support of Christian sympathy has been largely experienced; while the warm love of the brethren has been felt in all its soothing, elevating, and transforming influence. The prayers of saints whose hearts have been brought into a blessed agreement by the same spirit of adoption, have had power with God, and prevailed. Answers of prayer have been earnestly looked for, and in cases not a few actually realized. United praises offered in "sweet psalms" have been found an offering of a "sweet smelling savour," acceptable through Jesus Christ; and God has come in wondrous condescension to "inhabit the praises of his people." To use the beautiful language of one who powerfully exhibited the obligations and value of private fellowship meetings by his writings, and whose own lovely example strikingly enforced the lessons of spiritual wisdom which he taught:—"The enlarged effusion of the heart in prayer—the elevation of the mind in praise, and the harmonious-

ness of views, of desires, or of joy, have sometimes made these occasions memorable in recollection, and they have shed a lustre on the darker moments of a Christian's life. And even when not attended with high excitement of feeling, there has been experience of a sweet tranquillity and holy calm, which has soothed the spirit amid the bustle and turmoil of the occupations of life. The night of the fellowship meeting has been often anticipated with longings, and remembered with peculiar delight; and when removed by distance, or by infirmities, from such opportunities, the saints have felt refreshment in calling to remembrance the happy moments that have been thus enjoyed; and when their companions have been removed from them into another world, death, instead of breaking their fellowship, appears rather to have endeared and exalted it, while those left behind, look at things unseen, and come to "the spirits of just men made perfect."*

The Divine approval of private social fellowship is thus shown not only in the declarations of the Word, but likewise by the work of grace in the hearts and lives of believers, and by God's special providence towards them. In connexion with spiritual exercises in these assemblies, "the grace that bringeth salvation" has been imparted and increased. The blessing from above has descended "like the dew upon Zion's hill"; and believers have been edified and comforted; it has been found "good and pleasant" for brethren to dwell together in unity; and an influence at once salutary and powerful has gone forth from their intercourse, to bless the Church and

* Private Social Prayer—a Sermon by Andrew Symington, D.D. p. 21.

the world. How many holy purposes have been formed in the humble prayer-meeting! How many benevolent plans have been laid and carried into vigorous execution—which have been owned of God to bring down the power of darkness and sin in the world, and to promote the Divine glory! The saints of a former age who earnestly longed for Christian fellowship, and who felt its unspeakable value in seasons of conflict and trial, were accustomed to style the social meeting—“*a trysting place for the Beloved.*” Martyrs when on the scaffold, bidding adieu to all that was dear to them on earth, lingered with fond interest on scenes of hallowed intercourse with brethren in Christ; and the exclamation, “Farewell, sweet Fellowship Meetings!” was among the last testimonies uttered by men “of whom the world was not worthy,” when they were entering the world of glory. These meetings have been pre-eminently places where Christ and his people have held near and delighted intercourse. In all ages, they have been the nurseries of earnest and influential piety. Like the “fleece” of Gideon, they have been saturated with the dew of heaven, while the rest of the ground has been parched and dry. As feeding in “the beds of spices,” the Beloved is here—to mature and accept the fruits which Himself has produced, and to “gather lilies,” for his garland of glory. The obligations to observe the ordinance of stated private fellowship thus rank among the most weighty and constraining that are addressed to Christian sensibility. The voice of nature and enlightened reason demand such an institution—while the cravings and recognized wants of God’s people point to it as needful and indispensable.

Divine appointment and approval give it a lofty sanction. The example of the saints of God in all ages powerfully recommends the practice of private social fellowship, and their experience of eminently beneficial results from engaging in it, concurs to enforce, by motives the most affecting, attendance on this ordinance. The institution is to be regarded as not less a valuable privilege, than an important duty. The glory of God—the honour of Zion's King—the revival and comfort of believers—the blessing of the Church—and the spiritual renovation of the world—all may be greatly promoted by the private social fellowship of the people of God. Obligations more powerful and affecting cannot possibly unite to urge the diligent observance of any ordinance. Claiming an interest in Christ, the well-Beloved, and going forth to meet Him, where He has assured us of his presence and blessing, we should seek to have communion in the “garden of nuts,” joyfully declaring as the Spouse—“*Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, I will get me to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense.*”*

* Song iv. 8.

CHAPTER III.

HISTORY OF FELLOWSHIP-MEETINGS.

THE history of associations for spiritual fellowship dates from a very early period, and can be traced through the annals of the Church in various countries, and in all past ages. It is inseparably connected with the life and progress of true religion. Seasons of revival have been distinguished by meetings for united prayer and holy converse among those who were awakened by the Spirit, or who have been made at such times to experience the joys of God's salvation. Equally conspicuous has been the desire to unite in private communion by faithful witnesses for truth, in periods of trial and persecution. When devoted ministers have been cut off or driven away, and the assemblies in the sanctuary have been forcibly suppressed, the sufferers have cultivated endeared fellowship in private; and in remote retirements, and lone hiding-places, they have fanned the flame of earnest piety. While exposed to common afflictions, in loving intercourse with each other, they have realized fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ; and their prayers and praises poured forth from oppressed and yet joyful hearts, have come up in

remembrance before God, and have drawn down upon themselves and others manifold blessings. We have seen that, in the earliest times of the inspired history of the Church, the profession of true religion was connected with its friends separating from others, and, in private fellowship, "calling on the name of the Lord." During the Patriarchal Dispensation, there is evidence that the same ordinance of social worship existed. The *altars* which the patriarchs built in their sojourning in Canaan, and around which they collected their families and dependents for acts of united worship, were at once the means of spiritual communion, and a witness to the surrounding heathen of the nature and excellence of Divine revelation. The private fellowship of believers continued among God's ancient people till the last days of the Hebrew commonwealth. In times of defection and apostacy in Israel, and when the faithful had to endure persecution, they associated for mutual support and consolation. The "Four hundred prophets" shut up in a cave by Obadiah, in the reign of the idolatrous Ahab, doubtless took counsel together—spoke of Zion's wrongs, and of the covenant of their fathers forsaken—and sought, in earnest prayer, that the Lord would bring back to the land his departed glory. Thus, too, the captives in Babylon solaced their griefs, by recalling the stirring memories of the past, and hopefully anticipating the future, as they fixed their eye upon bright predictions, and sought in prayer their accomplishment. It deserves to be remembered that, by their captivity in Babylon, the Jewish people were completely weaned from idolatry; and this

may be ascribed as much to the blessing upon their fraternal intercourse, as to their witnessing the gross idolatrous practices which prevailed in the land of their captivity.

After the return from Chaldea, private fellowship appears to have been a stated and distinguishing part of the worship of the ancient Church until the close of the dispensation. Besides synagogues for the reading and expounding of the law, there were *Proseuchæ*, or retired places for solitary or united prayer. Such, it seems likely, the fearers of the Lord in Malachi's day frequented when they spake often one to another, and when the record of their believing converse was registered in the "Book of remembrance." Our Lord Himself, it is thought, had recourse to such places, sacred to prayer, when He "went up to a mountain to pray," and when He took his disciples apart for rest, and that He might impart to them fuller and more familiar instruction.

The "Church in the house" frequently mentioned in the Book of Acts and in the apostolic Epistles was, in primitive times, an institution for private Christian fellowship, in many instances, even more than for the exercise of the ministry, or for public worship. In the early trials through which the Church had to pass, and during the long period of Pagan persecution, assemblies for social worship were the means of preserving the truth, and of invigorating the piety and animating the hearts of Christian confessors. To such scenes of hallowed fraternal intercourse the persecuted people of God had recourse when faithful shepherds were cut off, and when they were denied access to public or-

dinances; and from these they came forth to bid defiance to the rage of the enemy, and to witness to the death a good confession. The records of the "Church in the Catacombs," so singularly brought to light in late years, shows that when the power of imperial Rome was wielded against the religion of Christ, his Church found a secure shelter among the tombs of believing brethren, and received nourishment and comfort too, from the private communion of saints in feeding on the Word, and in united prayer and praise.* Through many succeeding ages, when Papal Rome rose up to carry on the work of the Red Dragon in persecuting the saints, the life of the Church was preserved, in retired meetings for Christian fellowship, and her faith and love strengthened. When the enemy sought to devour the "Man-child," the woman, with two great wings of an eagle, is carried into the wilderness to a strong place prepared for her by God; and there "they fed her" until the throne of wickedness shall have been subverted, and the power of Antichrist broken.†

The Waldenses, who preserved Divine truth in its purity when Christendom was overrun with Antichristian corruptions, and were true to their motto, *Lux in tenebris*,† maintained a faithful profession, and enjoyed the communion of saints in meetings for prayer and spiritual converse. Thus did they animate one another to continue steadfast in their separation from the Romish apostacy; and by

* See the interesting volume, "The Church in the Catacombs," by Charles Maitland, Esq.

† Revelation xii. 6.

‡ Light in darkness.

the strength derived from such fellowship, they were excited and encouraged to singular and sustained efforts for the propagation of evangelical truth, throughout various countries of Europe. When the savage persecutions of the Papacy destroyed their sanctuaries, and interdicted their public assemblies for worship—when their humble but devoted “Barbes” were cut off, or forced into exile—and when, by the rage of the enemy, the Waldenses were expelled in a body out of their native country,—in all emergencies they had recourse to meetings for united prayer, as the great means of support and relief under long-continued and severe oppression, and as the Divinely-approved way of animating the hope of future deliverance. Ecclesiastical history records the marked attention of these early witnesses to this ordinance at different periods of their eventful history; and there can be no doubt that to it, in a large measure, are to be ascribed their remarkable unity in faith, and in a godly practice, and their heroic constancy in suffering. In the latter period of the Waldensian trials, shortly before the dawn of the Reformation, when “darkness that might be felt” had settled down upon the nations of Europe, when faithful witnesses had been almost wholly exterminated—when the voice of a public protest against Rome’s idolatry and oppression was nowhere distinctly heard throughout Western Christendom, we have on record an affecting testimony to the value which the remnant of these ancient confessors still set upon the social prayer meeting. It is related that at that time, one lonely *society*, which met in one of the secluded valleys of the Alps—brooding over the low condition of

Christendom, and deeply concerned to see if there was any quarter whence deliverance might be expected—after prayerful consultation, despatched *four* of their number, with instructions to travel north, south, east, and west, to inquire if there were any churches that held fast an evangelical profession, and maintained separation from the general corruption. After an absence of more than a year, these delegates returned, with the melancholy intelligence that they had found none. Still these “marked ones,” who sighed and mourned for “the abominations of the land,” did not relinquish prayer, or *forsake the assembling of themselves together*. Though we have no distinct record on the subject, there is every reason to conclude that they continued in deep seclusion and retirement—hidden from the rage of the enemy—to cultivate fraternal fellowship, and, in united prayer, to give utterance to the sorrows of their heart, and to look in faith for a time of deliverance.*

There are *two periods* in the history of Protestantism in every country in which the Reformed doctrines took root, that were eminently distinguished by unions for Christian fellowship and prayer. These were, *At the commencement of the movement*, when men were called to struggle with earnest and heartfelt convictions, and had likewise to contend against numerous powerful enemies; and again, *when the violence of persecution was excited* to root out the truth, and to extirpate faithful witnesses. At these times when the awful

* See “Letter of the Waldensian Churches to Æcolampadius,” in “Scott’s Continuation of Milner’s History of the Church of Christ,” vol. 1. p. 134, 135.

realities of religion were felt stirring the soul, and its power was tested in making great sacrifices, and in contending against manifold difficulties, the Fellowship Meeting was the chosen resort of faithful witnesses, where the Divine presence was sought and enjoyed; and from such a hallowed scene came forth many devoted men, strong in the faith, nerved with resolution and courage to attempt and suffer all things for the cause of Christ. Thus, in almost every country, was the infant reformation nursed and strengthened, amidst manifold conflicts and dangers, till it attained maturity; and before its progress opposition melted away. In Germany, Switzerland, and other continental States, those who embraced the truth sought fellowship together; and in cases not a few, the elements of a living Church were collected and arranged before they were favoured with the voice of a living preacher, or with the dispensation of public ordinances. At seasons, too, when the cause of the Reformation appeared to be in jeopardy, the Protestant leaders gathered fresh courage to go forward, bold in the goodness of their cause, and in Divine strength imparted in answer to earnest and united prayer. It is related that Luther on one occasion addressed an assembly of dispirited reformers, who were brooding over recent disasters, declaring that he would never despair of Christ's cause, for that lately, in passing through a village, he had found a number of women and young persons assembled, praying for the work of Reformation. As the English Reformation was eminently the fruit of reading the word, so the first English Reformers—Tyndale, Bilney, Frith, and Latimer,—soon as they received

the truth, assembled together for spiritual conference and mutual exhortation and prayer. Students of Cambridge and Oxford resorted to the prayer-meeting, to increase their acquaintance with the precious truths of the word—to impart to fellow-believers their new-born feelings and views, and to take sweet counsel together, respecting the propagation of the truth which had imparted to themselves light, and liberty, and comfort. As the light spread throughout England, many secret disciples derived from the same ordinance support and courage; and before the way was opened for the public preaching of the word, multitudes were thus prepared for boldly confessing Christ, and suffering for his name's sake.*

At a memorable period of the history of the Reformed Church in France, the value of association for Christian fellowship and united prayer was singularly shown. But for such an ordinance to resort to in a season of great trial and difficulty, the truth would have been borne down, and the cause of the Reformation had become extinct in that kingdom. It was after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes—when the most savage cruelties were inflicted upon the Protestants of France—when everything that an idolatrous and immoral priesthood could contrive, and a flagitious court could execute, was done to lead them to apostatize, and to blot out their name for ever. About the same time that the witnesses for “*Christ's Crown and Covenant*” in Scotland were mourning in sackcloth after the death of the faithful Renwick, means were

* See D'Aubigne's History of the English Reformation.

tried to revive from the dead the Reformed Church of France; and there, as in Scotland, deliverance came—not by human might nor power, but by the Spirit of the Lord, given in answer to prayer. After the wild and irregular warfare of the CAMISARDS had effected no deliverance, and when the condition of the Reformed in France appeared dark and hopeless in the extreme, ANTOINE COURT—then a youth, who has been justly styled—“THE RESTORER OF PROTESTANTISM IN FRANCE,” was raised up, and by contriving and executing singularly judicious measures, amidst uncommon difficulties, became the instrument of re-organizing the Reformed Church in his native country. The historian of “Protestantism in France” thus relates the plans and devoted efforts of this excellent man, who, when only sixteen or seventeen years of age, thoroughly embarked in his perilous enterprise, and never rested till he had accomplished his noble purpose:—

“Four conditions appeared to him to be necessary for the re-organization of the churches—regular religious assemblies—a direct and inflexible combat against the disorders of the inspired—the restoration of discipline by means of the consistories, conferences, and synods; and, finally, the formation of a body of pastors.”

“Antoine Court established, in the first place, *prayer-meetings* wherever he could shelter his head. They were but scanty in the beginning. ‘It was a great thing,’ he says in an *Apologetic Memoir*, written forty years afterwards, ‘when by force of cares and solicitation, I could induce six, ten, or a dozen of persons to follow me to some

mountain cave, or deserted grange, or to the open country, to render homage to God, and to hear the discourse I wished to address to them. What a consolation, however, it was to me to find myself, in 1744, in assemblies of 10,000 souls, in the same spot where I had with difficulty gathered together, during the first meetings of my ministry, fifteen, thirty, sixty, or at most a hundred persons!"

There speedily followed this establishment of prayer-meetings, the organization of *synodical conferences*. The first of these was held on the 21st August, 1715, eleven days after the death of the king, who thought to have crushed the French Reformation. These were held in the depth of a cavern, or in an isolated hut; as, if they had been discovered, all the members, or at least the preachers, would have been capitally punished. The regulations adopted for these assemblies and conferences were at once judicious and scriptural. "Elders were entrusted with the duty of watching over their flocks, of convoking assemblies in suitable places—of providing for the safety of the pastors, and of making collections for prisoners and the poor. Women were prohibited from speaking in the meetings of the faithful. The Bible was enjoined as the sole rule of faith, and individual revelations were rejected as anti-scriptural and dangerous."*

* The regulations adopted at these Synodical Conferences, aimed to promote the power of religion in all relations, and partook, too, of the nature of a solemn covenant-engagement—"Fathers of families were exhorted to cultivate worship at home *three times a day*, and to consecrate at least *two hours to devotion* on Sabbath. Those who committed grave offences were to be censured in public, after three admonitions in private. The pastors were recommended carefully to explain all the articles of religion, to procure information

"The Assemblies of the witnesses," as they were called, were held in open day, when the danger was not excessive—at night, when persecution was vigorous—in some wild retreat, or in rocky nooks and quarries, during adverse weather. The summonses were issued only a few hours before the meeting, and by emissaries of the most trustworthy character. Sentinels were placed about the heights, but unarmed, so that they might give the signal of the approach of soldiers.

When the prayer-meetings merged into assemblies where ministers attended, and dispensed public ordinances, the worship of the desert was conducted with scriptural simplicity—prayer, singing of psalms, preaching—administration of the Lord's Supper, at stated times—"a simple worship, easily practicable everywhere, and which required no more preparation than that of 'the upper room furnished,' in which the apostles and primitive Christians assembled at Jerusalem."

"This simplicity, however, possessed a charm of nobility and grandeur—the calm of solitude suddenly broken by the voice of prayer—the songs of the faithful mounting to the invisible Being, in the presence of the magnificence of nature—the minister of Jesus Christ invoking his God, like the faithful of the primitive Church, for the oppressors, who raged because they had not yet led them to the

respecting vices more common in each district, with a view to their correction, and to assemble every six months, for the purpose of intercommunication. If any pastor caused scandal to his brethren, or endangered them by his hasty zeal, he was to be immediately deprived of his appointment. An engagement was entered into to succour those who had suffered in the cause of religion, but to give no assistance to any who exposed themselves to persecution by their rashness."—(Synods of 1716 and 1717.)

scaffold,—poor peasants, humble artificers, who laying aside their tools of labour for a day, felt anxiety for nought but the sublime interests of the faith of the life to come. The common sentiment of danger which placed their souls continually in the presence of their Sovereign Judge, endued all the assemblies of the wilderness, with the serious magnanimity, which allies itself so well with the teaching of Christianity.”*

THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND in the early part of its history, felt the benefit of the friends of truth associating together in Private Prayer-Meetings. During the memorable period of the First Reformation, those who had abandoned the Romish Apostacy, and who were, in consequence, exposed to manifold hardship and suffering, thus strengthened and encouraged one another against the common enemy, and realized the supports and consolations of true religion. From the death of Patrick Hamilton, till Knox, on his return from the Continent, in concurrence with the Lords of the congregation, and other public servants of God, fully organized the church in some of the leading cities, the Protestants, while unsupplied with a faithful ministry, thus met and spoke often one to another. Especially, in many country districts, and in remote localities, the cause of the Reformation was nursed into life and vigour, and the souls of believers were edified by the reading of the Scriptures, and by united prayer and praise.†

* History of the Protestants of France, by E. De Felice.

† In the early history of the Reformation in Scotland, we find many striking instances of the value of Private Assemblies for Prayer, in furthering the incipient movement. Thus about the year 1546, a number of gentlemen met in a house in Mid-Lothian—

When Prelacy and arbitrary power combined to deprive the Church of Scotland of her Presbyterian liberties and privileges—when faithful ministers were driven into banishment, and the people were bereaved of their loved pastors, this primitive ordinance supplied the “Flock in the wilderness,” with spiritual nourishment and comfort. During the lengthened persecution, which followed the adoption of the Perth Articles in 1618, our Scottish forefathers had recourse to Private Prayer-meetings as a means of preserving the truth, and of mutual support and encouragement; and as the oppressions of Prelacy increased, in those assemblies they were animated to hold fast their profession, and to wait in hope for deliverance. We are informed that in the years which preceded the dawn of the Second Reformation—when the Moderator’s chair in Church-Courts was usurped by hireling Bishops, and when faithful men could not meet publicly for

and after united Prayer and mutual consultation, drew out and subscribed a bond, in which they pledged their lives, fortunes, and reputation, for the preservation and protection of “the blessed Evangel.” This is the first case of *covenanting* that we have on record in connexion with the establishment of Protestantism in Scotland. “About the year 1556, a number of Private Christians, who had been brought to the knowledge of the truth, (under the labours of the Reformers,) met together for religious conference, the reading of the Scriptures, and Prayer. This might be said to be the beginning of the Evangelical Church in Scotland. About this time they had no ministers, and the Sacraments were not dispensed. ‘Convinced,’ says Dr. M’Crie, (*Life of Knox*—second edition—vol. I. p. 229,) of the necessity of order and discipline in their societies, and desirous to have them organized, so far as within their power, agreeably to the institution of Christ, they proceeded to choose Elders for the inspection of their manners, to whom they promised subjection,—and *Deacons for the collection and distribution of alms to the poor.*” Edinburgh was the first place in which this order was established.—See “A Treatise on the Office of Deacon,”—by the Rev. John G. Lorimer, D. D.

deliberation, the friends of truth were accustomed to hold concerts for prayer, either by assembling in small numbers in different places, or by attending to the duty by mutual agreement, united in spirit and object, although not gathered together in one worshipping assembly. In this manner too, days of fasting were appointed, once a quarter or more frequently, and strictly observed by thousands, though not in any public manner. These services were not in vain. The crying of the prisoners ascended on high, and entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. At length, He remembered for his oppressed people, his holy covenant, and by singular displays of power, He arose to confound their adversaries, and to work for his Church manifold salvation.

In this country, especially, did Fellowship Prayer-Meetings, at this particular period, prove a source of abundant and lasting blessing. The Scottish Presbyterian Ministers, who were forced to leave their native land, from their conscientious opposition to Prelatic usages, brought with them to the northern province of Ireland, the standard of a faithful testimony for Divine truth, and through the blessing from on high upon their abundant labours, the wilderness was speedily converted into a fertile land. A *Revival* of religion took place, so powerful and remarkable that the fame of it reached distant countries, and the effects of it are yet discernible in the striking contrast between the moral, spiritual, and physical condition of Ulster, and that of other parts of the kingdom.* It is worthy of

* See Fleming on the Fulfilment of Scripture,—vol. II. pp. 96, 97 ; Reid's Hist. Presby. Ch. in Ireland,—vol. I. pp. 106—111 ; Life and Characteristics of Rev. John Livingston.

special remark that this revival originated in connexion with the Private Social Prayer-Meeting, and that it was carried forward through the same means. When the awakenings under the ministry of *Glen-dinning* took place at *Oldstone*, and in the district of the *Six Mile Water*, the proposal by a pious Scottish Colonist to assemble for united prayer at his house, was gladly hailed by a number who had been brought under convictions of sin, and who were concerned about the spiritual destitution that prevailed around them. As these assemblies increased, the faithful ministers regarded it as their duty to direct the movement, and to use it as a means of still farther extending the cause of true religion. The Private assemblies for united prayer, merged into the "MONTHLY MEETINGS" held at *Antrim*, where a number of ministers and devoted men from various parts were accustomed first to meet together for prayer and Christian conference; and where, on the following day, the word was preached with singular power to thousands who were hungering for the bread of life.*

Shortly after the commencement of the memorable

* The remembrance of these hallowed meetings was cherished long afterwards, and when Prelatic oppression and the Popish massacre of 1641, served to expel faithful ministers from the north of Ireland, and their attached flocks were deprived of the pure administration of public ordinances, and scattered—the Prayer-Meeting was resorted to, as the grand means of supplying their spiritual destitution, and of light and refreshment in the cloudy and dark day. In subsequent times, too, the written or traditionary record of the blessed effects of these solemn assemblies has been of eminent advantage to the cause of true and undefiled religion; so that in times of trial, and wherever evangelical religion has been preserved in its purity, and the power of practical godliness has been displayed, these blessings have been sought and obtained by means of associations for united prayer and Christian fellowship.

period of the SECOND REFORMATION, the General Assembly, which met in Aberdeen in 1641, took under their consideration the subject of Private Social Prayer-Meetings. This Assembly, under the apprehension that the practice of expounding Scripture, which was then frequently resorted to in these meetings, might lead to such extravagancies as had characterized sectaries on the continent, or might prove an introduction to Prelacy, passed an act limiting family worship to the members of the household, and forbidding to expound the Scriptures except by ministers or candidates for the ministry. Yet it is worthy of remark that this did not amount to a prohibition of Social Prayer-Meetings, when under proper regulations, and that the opposition to this ordinance of Christian fellowship was led by a person who, for unworthy conduct, was subsequently deposed from the ministry,—who afterwards in the times of persecution, accepted a Bishopric from the profligate Charles II., and who wrote memoirs of Scottish affairs, which abound in misrepresentations and calumnies.* The subject of discussion at this assembly is thus placed in its proper light by the Historian of the Church of Scotland:—

“During the domination of the Prelatic party, many religious people had withdrawn from the ministry of men from whom they derived no spiritual instruction; but to supply the want to the utmost of their power, they had adopted the measure of meeting together in private, and engaging in

* This was Henry Guthrie,—at that time minister of Stirling.—See for his character, Stevenson's History; M'Crie's Life of Henderson; Hetherington's History of Church of Scotland,—vol. I. p. 352.

reading the Scriptures, exhortation and prayer, for their mutual edification. Several who had been in Ireland, and other countries for a considerable time, had become so confirmed in this custom, that even after the Glasgow Assembly, the abolition of Prelacy, and the restoration of the purer and simpler modes of Presbyterian worship, they still continued their practice of holding these private religious meetings. The more pious ministers saw nothing offensive or improper in such private meetings of Christian worshippers; but there were others who looked on them with less favourable regard.* It is judiciously remarked by the same author, that the discouragement shown to Private Fellowship Meetings, at this time, produced afterwards the most injurious consequences. “This unseemly and ill-omened contention may be regarded as the first insertion of the wedge by which the Church of Scotland was afterwards rent assunder; and it deserves to be remarked that it was pointed and urged on by a Prelatist.”†

When the Prelatic persecution under Charles II. drove *three hundred* faithful Presbyterian ministers from their pulpits, and hireling curates were intruded upon their reluctant flocks, the value of Private Social Prayer-Meetings was again experienced, in upholding and comforting the servants of God in evil times. Thus were they fitted for patient endurance of privations and sufferings, and thus they were nerved for the noble conflict in which they engaged against Erastian power. In the latter part of the twenty eight years’ persecution, when under

* Hetherington’s Hist. Church of Scotland,—vol. I. p. 351.

† Ibid.—p. 352.

the cruel and arbitrary measures of the Popish and bigotted James, the number of faithful witnesses was greatly reduced; and by indulgences, and every other means that antichristian policy could invent, apostacy and defection were encouraged, the few resolute Covenanters who remained had recourse to united prayer, and cultivated fraternal fellowship, as a precious means of spiritual improvement, and of preservation and safety amidst manifold danger and suffering. Hence they were called "THE SOCIETY PEOPLE;" and the history of this disastrous period, whether as written by persons friendly or unfriendly to their cause, bears unequivocal testimony that it was, in a great measure, owing to their cordial and intimate union, and to their faithful exertions, that "the precious truths of the gospel were preserved, and that the civil and religious liberties of Britain were rescued from the grasp of despotic rulers."*

Even the prejudiced Wodrow is forced to confess that the "*Society People*," and not the "*Indulged*," preserved, in perilous times, true Presbyterian principles; and though he blames them for maintaining extreme sentiments, and for extravagant practices, he admits that among them were the honest and faithful martyrs at the period which was significantly designated "*The killing time*." Hetherington, a much more candid and impartial historian, freely acknowledges the eminent advantages reaped by Scotland's suffering Church from association in prayer-meetings, and the obligations under which the nation lies to the example of faith-

fulness and heroic self-devotion exhibited by the *Society people*. The following testimony is alike honourable to the head and heart of the writer:—
 “While Cargill perished on the scaffold, that determined band of Covenanters who had adhered to him were left without a minister—no man for a time daring to take up a position so imminently perilous. In this emergency, these fearless and high-principled men resolved to form themselves into a united body, consisting of *Societies* for worship and religious intercourse in those districts where they most abounded; and for the more effectual preservation of their opinions, and security against errors, in the absence of a stated ministry, these smaller societies appointed deputies to attend a General Meeting, which was empowered to deliberate upon all suggestions, and adopt such measures as the exigencies of the times required.”

“From the fact that these people, in the absence of a stated ministry, formed themselves into societies for mutual religious intercourse and edification, they came to be designated the ‘*Society People*’—a term frequently applied to them by Wodrow, as that of ‘*Cameronians*’ has been generally given to them by other historians. Superficial readers are liable to be misled by names, of the origin and application of which they have no accurate conception. But the affixing of a new name to a party is no sure proof that it has taken new grounds. That ‘persecuted Remnant,’ as they called themselves, had indeed taken up no new principles. The utmost that they can be justly charged with is, merely that they had followed up the leading principles of the Presbyterian and

Covenanted Church of Scotland to an extreme point, from which the greater part of Presbyterians recoiled; and that, in doing so, they had used language capable of being interpreted to mean more than they themselves intended. Their honesty of heart, integrity of purpose, and firmness of principle cannot be denied, and these are noble qualities; and if they did express their sentiments in strong and unguarded language, it ought to be remembered that they did so in the midst of fierce and remorseless persecution, ill-adapted to make men really cautious in the selection of balanced terms, wherein to express their indignant detestation of that unchristian tyranny which was so fiercely striving to destroy every vestige of both civil and religious liberty.”*

The REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH in these

* After the martyrdom of the youthful and truly illustrious Renwick—for a period of *seventeen or eighteen years*, the faithful party, to which Dr. Hetherington refers, were destitute of a public ministry, until the accession to their fellowship of the *Rev. John M'Millan* of Balmaghie.† During this period of lengthened persecution, they adopted no extreme or heterodox opinions—they maintained pure evangelical truth, and preserved Scriptural and strict discipline—thus affording a striking instance of the value of a full Scriptural Confession, and of association in private prayer-meetings. A record of the proceedings of the “GENERAL MEETINGS,” composed of delegates from the various scattered societies, that were held both before and subsequently to the death of Renwick, has been preserved in the rare work, entitled “*Faithful Contendings*,” which deserves to be better known and more widely circulated than it is, both on account of the valuable information that it contains, and because of the example which it furnishes of earnest and loving piety shining forth in the spirit and lives of a people, reduced, through the violence of persecution, to great outward privations and distresses. The letters of Sir Robert Hamilton, from his exile in Holland, to the Societies, give striking evidence of the spirituality, wisdom, and untiring activity of that excellent though much misrepresented witness for the royal prerogatives of the Redeemer.

† Hetherington's Hist Ch. of Scotland, vol. II., p. 122—124.

countries, which claims to inherit the principles, as it occupies the position, in relation to the civil and ecclesiastical establishments of the land, of the Society People, has carefully maintained, to the present day, the institution of Fellowship Prayer-Meetings. Under the Divine favour, this has been to this section of the Church a means of safety and extensive blessing. During the eighteenth century, when in these countries, and throughout continental Europe, evangelical religion everywhere declined, and purity of religious ordinances was generally undervalued, the Covenanting Body held aloft a standard for the truths of the gospel—maintained a faithful discipline—and the lives and conduct of its members were exemplary. These attainments were reached, not only in a state of complete separation from corrupt civil and ecclesiastical systems, but often amidst the positive hostility of persons in authority, and the apathy and opposition of the community, bent on backsliding and defection. The “Societies” in the Reformed Presbyterian Church have all along served to fan the flame of genuine piety among her members, as they have united them in fraternal bonds—been the birth-place of souls, and seminaries for the godly training of the young—and as the “beds of spices” where the Beloved feeds, and holds delighted communion with his people.

It deserves special observation, in tracing the history of private social prayer-meetings, that such assemblies have ever been found connected with *seasons of revival of religion*, and have been highly valued by those who have maintained practical godliness amidst prevailing defections; while the decline

of serious religion has been frequently indicated by professors forsaking the assembling of themselves together. The late Dr. M'Crie judiciously remarks—"Two things go to prove that professors of religion have been, in a great degree, strangers to heavenly desires—First, the rareness of religious conversation in their occasional discourse; Secondly, the falling off of meetings for prayer and religious converse. Our fathers grudged not to abridge their hours of labour, and their hours of rest; they scrupled not, with the light of the moon and the stars, to travel, and to spend hours in a smoky hovel, that they might enjoy the foretaste of heaven upon earth, while we, with every accommodation and facility, will not go out of our houses or cross a street to enjoy the privilege. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. To what can we ascribe them but to earthliness of affection, distrust of God, and want of brotherly love?"*

In all instances of powerful revival, meetings for social prayer and believing intercourse have been a precious fruit of the waterings of the Spirit; and they have, at the same time, been a powerful means of carrying forward the good work, and of rendering it productive of permanent benefit to the Church. Wherever the overwhelming importance of eternal interests has been felt, the awakened have been drawn to speak often one to another, and have been impelled to give utterance to the deep emotions of their hearts in united prayer. Both in former and later seasons of revival, assemblies for social spiritual fellowship have been a marked characteristic of

* Sermons, by the late Dr. M'Crie, p. 14.

the Spirit's gracious work, in quickening "the dry bones," and reviving the heritage of the Lord. Thus in England, under the ministry of VENN, and WALKER, and BERRIDGE, the awakened were formed into societies for prayer, and, by this means, the work begun was continued and extended to other districts.

One of Venn's converts at *Huddersfield* writes — "We had a meeting of the most pious at Mrs. Scholefield's, once or twice a week, about *twenty* of us, where a subject given out one time was discussed the next. One of us was the Leader, and opened with prayer; afterwards he asked all round their opinions, and concluded with prayer. The meeting at Longwood had more than ours. There was another at Berrybrow, and one, a kind of general one, at the town."*

The awakenings which took place in various parts of England under the ministry of WESLEY and WHITEFIELD led to the establishment of social prayer-meetings; and at a period when *within* the pale of the National Establishment, and *without* it, all was under the torpor of spiritual death, this organization was a powerful means of exciting earnest minds, to pursue after eternal concerns, and to press them upon the serious attention of others. However defective and erroneous on some points is the doctrinal system of the followers of Wesley, there can be no doubt that to the practice of attending the weekly "Class-meetings," each presided over by a "Leader," they are, in a large measure, indebted for their remarkable union

* History of Revivals of Religion in the British Isles — p. 29.

and increase, and that thus have been originated and sustained their wonderful exertions for propagating religion both throughout Christian and heathen countries.

One of the most important revivals of religion, when the effects are considered, is that which occurred in the PRINCIPALITY OF WALES, during the second quarter of the eighteenth century, under HOWEL HARRIS, and the REV. DANIEL REYNOLDS; and this was carried forward and fostered by means of private societies for prayer and religious conference. The Welsh, who had been previously left almost wholly neglected and in ignorance by the ministers of the Established Church, when they were awakened, embraced the truth in its simplicity, attended upon ordinances administered with a large measure of scriptural purity, and exhibited a practice becoming the Gospel. The WELSH CALVINISTIC METHODISTS, as they are designated, have continued to be distinguished for a strict adherence to evangelical doctrine, and for godly practice, above any other class of Dissenters in England; and it is an honourable testimony borne to the inhabitants of the Principality, that the time when the last "*Census of Religious Worship*" was taken, a much larger proportion of them was found attending upon public ordinances than of the inhabitants of any other part of England. It is related of Harris, who may be considered "the father" of the Body, that "He frequently attended the meetings which the people held for the purpose of teaching each other to sing the praises of God, that he might thus have an opportunity of impressing them with a sense of their eternal state. On these occasions, many were

convinced of their sinfulness. This encouraged Mr. Harris to establish regular meetings of serious persons for religious conversation in several other places, and this was the commencement of the *Private Societies* which have ever since (taking into consideration the great importance and strictness attached to their observance) formed a principal feature by which the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists may be distinguished from every other denomination of professing Christians.* Rowlands availed himself of the same ordinance to extend and perpetuate the revival; and when the Welsh Calvinistic Body became organized as a distinct section of the Church of Christ, they embodied in their "CONSTITUTION AND FUNDAMENTAL REGULATIONS" the ordinance of *fellowship-meetings*, and required the members to attend upon it with all diligence. It is, doubtless, owing to the punctuality with which this regulation is observed by the Welsh Calvinists, in the various places where they are scattered, that they are enabled to preserve among them the doctrines of the Gospel uncorrupted, and to maintain,

* History of Revivals—p. 94. In the Memoirs of the late Rev. Rowland Hill, it is mentioned that in one of his last visits to the Societies in South Wales, he was much touched by, and often spoke of, the following little incident. During the meeting of the Society a man, verging towards a hundred years old, raised himself from the corner in which he was reclining, and while he aided his feeble limbs by leaning on his trembling hands, he raised his quivering voice, and addressed himself to the young ministers, in his broken English—"Brethren, let me tell you this—I have heard Daniel Rowlands preach, and I heard him once say, 'Except your consciences be cleansed by the blood of Christ, you must all perish in the eternal fires.'" Rowlands had been more than half a century in glory, but here a voice, as from the grave, bore testimony to his faithfulness in proclaiming Christ, and in warning sinners to flee from the wrath to come.

above any other religious body in England, a strict scriptural discipline.*

The revivals at *Cambuslang* and *Kilsyth*, about the year 1742, were distinguished for meetings of the awakened for united prayer and Christian conference. Thus was the good work carried forward—convictions of sin were strengthened—evangelical light was increased—the souls of the godly were confirmed—and many were brought to rejoicing in the hope of salvation. The power, extent, and salutary effects of the Revival were the fruits, as much of the fervent prayers of those who had been brought to feel the unspeakable importance of Divine things, as of the faithful preaching of the word. Solemn impressions impelled those who were quickened to “speak often one to another,” and to pour out the fervent emotions of their hearts in united prayers and in joyful praises, while the power and beauty of true religion thus exemplified attracted others to join themselves to the Lord and his people.

In the recent remarkable revival which occurred in one of these parishes (*Kilsyth*), about ten or

* A striking instance of the facility afforded by meetings for united prayer and spiritual converse, for benevolent and decided exertion, occurred in the steps taken by the Welsh Calvinistic Body in *Liverpool*, some years ago, for establishing a Mission to the Heathen. After frequent social conference, it was resolved that the members of the Church should pledge themselves to abstain from all intoxicating drinks, and that the money thus saved should be religiously dedicated to the extension of the cause of Christ at home and abroad. The consequence was that, in a short time, two new houses of worship in connexion with the body were erected in *Liverpool* and the neighbourhood, and a Mission to India was commenced, which has since been sustained at an expense of some £1800 or £2000 annually, and which has already been instrumental in diffusing the knowledge of Christ throughout regions hitherto unvisited by Christian missionaries, and in gathering sinners to Christ.

twelve years ago, there was furnished another striking instance of the inseparable connexion between living Christianity and the observance of social prayer-meetings. The Rev. Mr. Burns, the pious minister of the parish, in giving an account of the Revival, stated that at the time when the first serious impressions began to manifest themselves, there were two *dancing-schools*, some *political clubs*, and an *infidel association* in the village of Kilsyth, containing a population of some 2500 persons, while, throughout the whole parish, there were but *two prayer-meetings*, thinly and irregularly attended. As soon as the shower of the Spirit's influences descended, and men's minds became impressed with the unspeakable importance of spiritual things, the dancing-school, and political and infidel associations were abandoned; and, in a little time, no fewer than *sixty prayer-meetings* were established throughout the parish. Such, too, was the depth of religious impressions, that at one period of the revival, for a whole day or two, all worldly business was suspended in the village of Kilsyth—the overwhelming conviction of the worth of the soul and of the importance of salvation appearing to have taken exclusive possession of all minds.

From this induction, which might be largely extended, it is manifest that the universal judgment of the Church, in its best periods, is in favour of private social worship. This ordinance has been found by experience, and confessed, to be necessary to revive decayed religion, and to maintain and extend living Christianity. Wherever it has gone into disuse, practical religion has declined—the power of evangelical truth has ceased to be felt, and griev-

ous error has entered and made progress. Private social worship, and meetings for this object, uniformly languish and go into disuse, when error and worldliness make inroads upon the Church. This has been remarkably observable among the Protestant communities of the Continent, as well as throughout many Protestant churches in these countries; and just in proportion as the institution is properly observed, or neglected—either by some sections of the Church rather than others, or by persons in the same religious connexion above others, so may we mark the vigour or decline of a religious profession, and of practical godliness. To any reflective mind, who meditates either upon the statements of the inspired word, or on the method of the Divine Government, the reason of this must be apparent. Social prayer and private fellowship is a service due to the Saviour who purchased the Church with his own blood, and who has established the “Household of faith.” It is rendered necessary by the common wants, temptations, dangers, and duties of those who belong to the spiritual family; and it is in the highest degree fit and right, as a due expression of the sense of benefits received, and a blessed means of extending and perpetuating Scriptural privileges. Of the manifold *benefits* resulting from social private fellowship we shall hereafter speak. Meanwhile, it must be apparent that the Church has, in all past periods, been largely indebted to this institution for securing her most precious privileges, and for the enjoyment and continuance of special blessings. Future eras of trial and of enlargement and victory, it should seem to us, will be yet more strikingly marked by joyful attend-

ance upon meetings for private fraternal communion. The value and efficiency of association, to promote union and confidence, and to effect desired purposes, are now acknowledged in almost all human pursuits, civil, commercial, political, and literary. In the coming work, struggles and conflicts of the Church, prayerful association will be largely tried, and the fruits will be salutary in an eminent degree. People shall be gathered together, and kingdoms to serve the Lord.* “*Thus saith the Lord of hosts, It shall yet come to pass, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities; and the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts; I will go also. In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, we will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.*”†

* Psalm cii. 22.

† Zechariah viii. 20, 21—23.

CHAPTER IV.

SUBJECTS OF CHRISTIAN INTERCOURSE IN FELLOWSHIP-MEETINGS.

SOME of the special designs for which Christians associate together in fellowship-meetings are, that the knowledge of Divine things may be increased—that believers may mutually help and encourage one another in the ways of godliness—that by the due performance of all relative duties, brotherly love and sympathy may be promoted—and that all the members of the Church may have fellowship one with another, in the spiritual gifts and graces with which they are endowed. “EDIFYING ONE ANOTHER IN LOVE” is not only the duty, but likewise the privilege of those who profess to belong to the family of faith; and the institution of social prayer is eminently adapted to promote this great object, and to advance those who delight in it to “the stature of perfect men in Christ Jesus.”

The intercourse of Christians in stated associations for converse and united prayer, which should be wholly *spiritual*, is carried on, through the word, by means of converse on the truth—in the way of mutual instruction, exhortation, reproof, and

consolation—by imparting the experience of the heart, in relation to the operations of Divine grace, and to supports enjoyed in duty and trial—and by joint prayer and praise. Believers come together that they may themselves enjoy benefit, and that they may communicate benefit to others. In terms of the invitation of Moses to Hobab, his brother-in-law, they welcome others to their holy fellowship—*“Come thou with us, and we will do thee good, for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.”* They offer, too, the same powerful motive and encouragement—*“It shall come to pass, yea, it shall come to pass, that whatever good the Lord will do unto us, we will even do unto you.”** This “Good” which the Lord does unto his people they impart to each other, first of all, by spiritual converse—then by prayer with and for one another—and by joint praise and thanksgiving. “They that feared the Lord spake often one to another.” Their intercourse by speech was about nothing trivial or worldly, but about matters of infinite importance; for the Lord Himself, whom they loved and served, listened with interest, and recorded in his “book of remembrance” the subject of their intercourse.

SPIRITUAL CONVERSE.—To maintain this converse aright, Christians should regard their assembling together for social intercourse as a holy ordinance appointed by God for the promotion of his glory, and for their own spiritual advantage and that of others. They should therefore watch, and carefully guard against the introduction of any matters or words that are unsuitable. They should

* Numbers x. 29.

speak to one another what they have learned from the word of God—what they have already spoken to God Himself in prayer, and what has been to themselves matter of heartfelt experience. They should be able, in all that they say in the assembly of the brethren, virtually to declare—“We have believed, therefore have we spoken,” and it should be apparent to those who have intercourse with them, that “out of the abundance of the heart their tongue speaks.”

The spiritual converse, moreover, of those who meet in stated fellowship, should *not be conducted in the way of authority or formal address*, but should be *free and familiar*, the strong being helpful to the weak—the weakest contributing his share, and each aiming to promote the edification and comfort of the whole body. When fellow-travellers to Zion meet together in the solemn assembly, and converse about Divine things, they should speak in a devotional spirit, and so as to excite and nourish devotional feelings in others.

The *matters* of Christian intercourse are the great truths of the word—given by Christ, not only to make wise to salvation, but to be the distinctive mark of genuine discipleship, and the grand means of spiritual intercourse and communion. “Then said Jesus to those Jews who believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”* “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, and hymns, and

* John viii. 31, 32.

spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”* “That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his son Jesus Christ.”† These beautiful passages teach us, that converse about the truths of the word is to proceed not from mere speculative views, or transient impressions, but from the rich indwelling of the Word, and from continuing under its power, in practical subjection to it; and that the truths of the Scripture are to be employed for mutual instruction, exhortation, and comfort. Thus the Word spoken in love becomes the great means of fellowship with saints; and this again is the nearest step to the enjoyment of the highest privilege of which any are capable—communion with the persons of the most glorious Godhead. Would we realize this exalted fellowship? The truths about which we converse must previously be matters of believing experience, and must enter largely into our spiritual life. We must be able to say—*“That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you.”* Personal acquaintance with the power of the truth will give weight to the words uttered. The “speech seasoned with salt” will “minister grace to the hearers”—and, like the intercourse between the apostles and primitive Christians, when they met after receiving injurious treatment from persecuting Jewish rulers, converse on the word known, loved, and experienced will lead to united, prevailing prayer, and to joyful praise and thanksgiving.

* Colossians iii. 16.

† 1 John i. 3.

While all the truths of Divine revelation may form appropriate topics of spiritual converse, there are subjects which, both as being doctrinal, and eminently practical and consolatory, will ever furnish matter of unfailing interest, and delightful intercourse to God's believing people. These too, when opened up and enlarged upon, in the freedom of fraternal converse, and in the outflowings of sanctified affection, will supply matter of fervent pleading at the Mercy-seat.

1. The wondrous PLAN OF HUMAN REDEMPTION will always form a theme of profitable spiritual converse, and believing prayer, to God's people. Angels contemplate with amazement and delight the costly scheme, and ever "*desire to look into these things.*" Saints that have gone to glory view with admiration the work of redemption, and make it the ground of their loftiest praise. The plan of man's salvation brings into view the persons of the glorious Godhead, their counsels of sovereign wisdom and love from eternity. Believers are instructed to address God as "OUR FATHER WHICH ART IN HEAVEN," in joint supplications. His paternal character and sovereign love in the gift of his Well-Beloved Son, will furnish a theme of adoring wonder and absorbing interest for ever. The love and condescension of the Second person of the Trinity, in becoming Surety and Mediator, will excite fervent gratitude and praise; while the Covenant between the Father and the Son concerning man's salvation, must always elicit earnest regard, and inspire the children of God with joyful confidence. Hence originate all the blessings of redemption, and from this as an unfathomable, unfailing Fountain,

flow all rich streams of blessing. Believers take hold of this covenant for themselves, and even amid manifold troubles, declare it to be “all their salvation, and all their desire;” and in their intercourse one with the other, the “Counsel of peace”—the “New Testament,” ratified by the blood of the Testator, cannot fail to supply topics of delightful converse and of fervent social prayer. The Saviour Himself, as He entered on his last sufferings, had his spirit refreshed and elevated, in contemplating the eternal purpose of mercy. “And now, O Father, glorify Thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.” “Thine they were, and Thou gavest them me.” “I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it, that the love wherewith Thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.”* The Divine love in the Covenant has ever been to the saints a subject of fervent prayer and adoring praise. Earnestly have they prayed—“Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people; O visit me with thy salvation.” Joyfully have they exclaimed in praise—“Unto Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever;”† and with the redeemed in heaven, believers on earth, unite in the emphatic ascription—“SALVATION TO OUR GOD WHICH SITTETH UPON THE THRONE AND TO THE LAMB.” The converse of fellow-saints on the economical relations of the persons of the Godhead, on the love

* John xvii. 5, 23—26.

† Psalm cvi. 2; Revelation i. 5, 6.

which originated human redemption, and on the Covenant of grace is eminently fitted to enlarge their views, minister to their spiritual support and consolation—lead them to assured confidence, and excite them to prayer and to abounding praise and thanksgiving.

2. *The Person, character, and work of the Redeemer* furnish diversified subjects of spiritual converse. He is Immanuel—God with us—Jehovah our righteousness—the mighty God blessed for ever. His work of vicarious obedience, and his atoning sacrifice, derive all their efficacy from his Godhead; and the firmest ground of confidence is supplied from the perfection of his atonement, and the supreme excellence of his character. The ransom which He paid is infinite, and it is therefore adequate to cancel all the sinner's debt. The blood shed is incalculably precious, and it can cleanse from all sin. The Saviour is almighty, and He is therefore “able to save to the uttermost all that will come unto God by Him.”* The Saviour executes all needful offices, and stands to his people in all endearing relations. He is prophet, priest, and king in the Covenant. He is his people's Husband, Shepherd, Elder Brother, Physician, and Friend. He is their light and saving health—their shield and hiding-place—their treasure and all. These relations He occupies, and this character He sustains unchangeably. Jesus is “the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.” The work which He carries on in heaven, as a great High Priest and glorious King, is the complement of his atonement on earth. He

* Hebrews vii. 25.

was delivered for our offences, and He rose again for our justification. The living Redeemer applies what the dying Saviour purchased. It is our cause which He advocates in heaven. Into his hands is committed all power in heaven and earth; and He conducts the government of all worlds, that He may gather his elect from all nations, and bring many sons to glory. Believers delight to embrace Christ as a personal Saviour—as their only Beloved and Friend, and to have intercourse with Him; and in their fellowship with one another, they cannot refrain from declaring his gracious dealings towards them, and from showing forth his praise.

3. *The character and work of the Holy Spirit* will form another fertile theme of Christian intercourse.

The Holy Spirit is the grand promise of the New Economy—the great agent in the application of the blessings of redemption. The Saviour died to open the way for the mission of the Spirit. He went up to glory to send Him, that He might compensate for the want of his personal presence with his people, and might put them in possession of all the blessings of the Redeemer's purchase. "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart I will send Him unto you." "He shall glorify me; for He shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you."* In every view of his character and work, the blessed Spirit is an object of unspeakable interest to the believer; and the consideration of his person, office, and

* John xvi. 7—14.

operations supplies to him subjects of devout contemplation, and of profitable and delightful converse. The Divine personality of the Spirit—his love and concern in the Covenant of grace, as a consenting and approving party—and the distinct part which He acts in the application of redemption are doctrines vital and all important. The work of the Spirit on the human nature of the Saviour—in the eminent endowments of the Apostles—in the inspiration of Holy Scripture—and in the setting up of the Christian dispensation are subjects of contemplation, at once wonderful and most engaging. And his perpetual office, and continual sanctifying work in the Church can never fail to engage the attention, and excite the admiration and praise of all who love God's salvation.

Redemption must be particularly and individually applied, if it is to be of any avail to us; and this is the exclusive promise of the Holy Spirit—the Divine sanctifier and comforter. Spiritual blessings are communicated solely through his gracious presence and powerful operation. Here all is matter of amazing condescension, and of humble and profound gratitude and joyful praise. The Spirit quickens the soul dead in sin. He enlightens the mind and renews the heart. He unites to Christ, the living Head. He Himself comes to dwell in the heart as a present Deity—making the person a living temple, and sealing to the day of redemption. He reveals Christ and the Covenant to the soul—applies the promise—intimates pardon to the conscience—gives enlarged liberty in God's ways—warms the heart in love, and leads into endeared fellowship with God. He is the efficient Agent in promoting holiness—the

witness of sonship, and the *earnest* of heaven. All spiritual blessings in Christ, the living Head, are communicated by the Spirit to the members on earth. He is within them as “the Spirit of grace and supplication—helping their infirmities, and giving them access with boldness to the heavenly Throne. The Spirit is the blessed author of revival to the people of God—the unction whereby they understand all things. He imparts to them abounding peace—He comforts and elevates their hearts—confers a meetness for glory and an assured hope, and at length conducts them to the land of uprightness. In the view of such precious spiritual blessings as revealed in the word, and having some experience of these gracious operations, believers honour the Spirit, and cannot but seek his presence and saving work for themselves, as their highest privilege. Solemnly warned that “if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his,” they are encouraged, at the same time, by the assurance that the “Holy Spirit will be given to them that ask him.” This cannot but form one of the believer’s chief and most frequent desires. They will seek the Spirit to lead them into all truth—and as the Comforter promised, to abide with them for ever. “*Thy Spirit is good, lead me unto the land of uprightness.*” “*Take not thy Holy Spirit from me.*” “*Awake, O north wind, and come thou south, blow upon my garden, that the spices may flow out.*”*

To fellow-believers and to others, the saints cannot but speak of the love and joy of the Spirit, and

* Ps. cxliii. 10; li. 13; Song iv. 16.

make mention at times of his saving operations. All past blessings have been enjoyed by the Church through his person and powerful influence. He has awakened and converted sinners. In holy ordinances, He has been the living water. Ministers have been sanctified and blessed by the anointing of the Spirit. The word has been "in demonstration of the Spirit and in power." Plentiful rain from heaven has watered the heritage of the Lord. Many sons have been born in Zion; and believers, walking in the Spirit, have attained to "joy and peace in believing," and have abounded in the fruits of holiness. The Spirit is a spirit of liberty, and of concord in all the churches. The promise and hope of future blessing for the Church are inseparably connected with the plentiful effusion of the Spirit—"I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed—my blessing upon thine offspring." "Until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field."* Those who have tasted this heavenly gift, and who know how necessary to themselves is the gracious presence of the Divine Comforter, cannot but speak of Him to fellow-believers. Converse on such a theme is fitted to minister inexhaustible matter of edification and comfort. Here, too, is a subject of united prayer, the most suitable and comprehensive—a theme, too, of animating hope and joyful expectation. As saints converse of the Spirit and of his wonderful works, they "walk in the Spirit" and honour Him. Their hearts are pre-

pared for the reception of this heavenly Guest; and He is wont, not unfrequently, to come in and impart to them light and strong consolation. The future glory and blessedness of the Church, as connected with the promise of the Spirit, presented to the eye of faith, are fitted to unite believers in the most endeared fellowship—to support them under all present trials, and to animate and strengthen them in the Christian work and warfare.

4. *The Church of Christ—its ordinances, privileges, and prospects* must ever form a subject of affecting interest to believers—a fertile topic of spiritual converse—and copious matter of earnest prayer. The Church, comprising all the redeemed and sanctified—the excellent of the earth—is an object of the most endeared interest to Christ, as it is the grand means of manifesting the Divine glory in the earth. The Church is the body of which Christ is the exalted Head—the costly building of which He is the Architect, foundation, and Chief Corner Stone—the kingdom, of which He is the sole gracious king—the elect spouse, of which He is the heavenly Bridegroom and living Head—it is “the *Fulness of Him that filleth all in all.*” In this society believers have the deepest interest. “*Jerusalem which is above is the mother of us all.*” Therein the saints were born to newness of life—thence they derive all their spiritual nourishment, and obtain bright and blissful hopes. Here they behold “the beauty of the Lord,” as they reverently inquire in his temple. They see “the goings of the king in his sanctuary; and as He is “held in the galleries,” they obtain from him richest blessings. Need it be wondered at that

the saints should fervently desire the privileges of the Church, and that they should continually seek her prosperity? Delight in holy ordinances is characteristic of all true believers. Desire after the privileges of God's house, and rest in them have originated many of their most fervid expressions—
 “Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth.”
 “How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.” “As the heart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God!” “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.” “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.” “All my springs are in thee.” “This is my rest for ever; here will I dwell; for I have desired it.”*

Not for themselves alone do the saints ardently love and delight in Zion. From the Church on earth, a boundless revenue of honour redounds to all the persons of the Godhead. Here the glory of the blessed Trinity is made great. Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined. Unnumbered millions, too, of the human family, receive light and peace, manifold blessings and blessedness in time and throughout eternity, through the ministry, ordinances, and fellowship of the Church. All the revolutions of nations—all events—all movements throughout the universe, are

* Psalm xxvi. 8; lxxxiv. 1, 2; xlii. 1.
 Psalm cxxxvii. 1, 5, 6; lxxxvii. 7; cxxxii. 14.

rendered subservient to her best interests. Angels of light,—principalities and powers in heavenly places see, with wonder, in the Church, “the manifold wisdom of God.” Ascending to Mount Zion, we “come to an innumerable company of angels,” and these exalted beings account it their high honour to encamp around the Church. They evince the deepest interest in all her concerns, and they minister continually to them that shall be “heirs of salvation.” Fellow-members of this distinguished society—fellow-citizens of Jerusalem which is above, believers, when they meet together, maintain a frequent interchange of thoughts, desires, and prayers, about Zion. Here have their hearts found a centre and a resting-place of mutual interest and warmest affection. They cannot but be mutually and deeply affected by the Church’s trials and conflicts. They cannot but rejoice in her welfare, as “they suck the breasts of her consolations.”

Whatever promotes her benefit is to them a common concern—engaging their devoted and sustained activities. The state of the Church in every land excites their heartfelt and prayerful interest. They cannot but be troubled in spirit when any part of the Church is low and oppressed, as the tidings of enlargement and revival minister the liveliest joys to their hearts. The prospects of her future glory frequently raise believers, united in holy fellowship, above present discouragements—animate them to devoted effort and encourage them to submit cheerfully to embittered sufferings. With these prospects full in view, Apostles, Reformers, and Missionaries have devoted their lives to the advancement of truth; and many a heroic martyr, glad-

dened by them, triumphed at the stake or on the scaffold, and encouraged fellow-confessors to resolute endurance. Huss, Latimer, Tyndale, and many Covenanted worthies thus, with the eye steadily fixed on the future triumph of the truth, and on the future glory of the Church, cheerfully surrendered life in the cause of Christ—and their bright example encouraged others to embrace the truth as it is in Jesus. The standard, as it fell from the hands of men who loved not their lives to the death, was grasped by others, to be transmitted from one generation to another, until all the ends of the earth shall see God's salvation. Actuated by the same spirit, and rejoicing in the same delightful prospects, we should cherish the pious resolution of those who of old were united in holy fellowship—“For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth.” “I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord.” “For my brethren and companions' sake, I will now say, Peace be with thee. Because of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek thy good.”*

5. *The Kingdom and Providences of the Redeemer form* to the saints delightful subjects of spiritual converse. The Lord Jesus Christ, the King of saints, rules supreme throughout the universe. He is not only the Creator of all things in heaven and earth, but “by him all things consist.”† To him has been given “power over all flesh,” that He may “give eternal life to as many as God has

* Isaiah lxii. ; Ps. cxxii. 1, 8, 9.

† Colossians i. 17.

given him.”* A “name above every name” has been conferred upon him, that “at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, and every tongue confess, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth.” He is “Head over all things to his Church, which is his body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.”† To the saints of God, the consideration of the kingdom of providence being under the dominion of the Mediator, is matter of deepest interest, and is replete with the strongest consolation. It is, indeed, a theme of the loftiest and most delightful contemplation. All things are in the hands of their Saviour and Elder Brother, for the advancement of the Divine glory, and the everlasting good of his people. Intricate and wonderful as are the movements of providence, they are all under the control of the “GOVERNOR AMONG THE NATIONS.” Above the throne is the “likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it.”‡ The whole dispensation is conducted according to the arrangements of the everlasting Covenant—“As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about.”§ The “seven-sealed Book,” containing the purposes of sovereign wisdom and love towards the Church, and to each individual believer, is in the hands of the Lamb slain, and the Lion of the tribe of Judah. He alone “prevails” to open it,—as He sheds the light of his glory on every dark page, and renders all things conducive to the best interests of His people.

* John xvii. 2.

† Phil. ii. 12; Ephes. i. 22.

‡ Ezekiel i. 26.

§ Ver. 28.

How satisfactory and cheering to them is such a discovery! All beings, elements, and events are under the immediate control of their own Lord and Redeemer. He manages all the concerns—the most important and the most minute—of his saints, in infinite wisdom and love. Their footsteps He orders aright. He carves out their lot—appoints them their various services, and administers all needed help and strength for their performance. Over their trials He presides, and renders them as the refiner's fire and fuller's soap—the means of their sanctification, and of their preparation for honour and glory. Their enemies He restrains and brings down—and upon the waters of trouble through which they are called to pass, He comes walking in majesty and condescension—proclaiming when they are in fear or danger—“*Be still, and know that I am God.*” “It is I, be not afraid.” The believer is thus furnished with matter of firm confidence and joyful hope in every possible case. “His Father is at the helm.” His interests could not possibly be in better hands. Whatever may betide, he is safe, and all needful provision for soul and body is sure. His “place of defence is the munition of rocks, where his bread shall be given, and his water made sure.”* The issues to him are unspeakably joyful. He will, without fail, reach the desired haven. His “eyes shall see the King in his beauty; they shall behold the land that is very far off.”†

While believers note the movements of providence towards themselves and fellow-saints as special and gracious, and observe providential dealings

. * Isaiah xxxiii. 16.

† Ver. 17.

with others around them, they fix their regards, too, upon the *kingdom of Christ*, in its present state, and future prospects. The varied aspects of human affairs—the changes occurring throughout the nations of the earth—providential blessings and judgments are viewed in relation to the Mediator's kingdom. The universal dominion of the Mediator is the grand central principle that explains the whole, and displays the harmony and consistence of the wondrous scheme. “The Lord reigneth, let the earth be glad.” The “signs of the times” are thus observed by the believer with vivid attention and absorbing interest—and his sympathies are ever with the cause of true religion and scriptural morality, and with the kingdom of Christ, whether prosperous or adverse. While the enthroned Mediator presides over all, and conducts every event and change to a blessed issue, the Church of the redeemed is the centre of all providential movements, and the prayers of the faithful have an important influence on every part of the dispensation. Elijah, a man of like passions with us, shut and opened heaven by his prayers. Thus, too, “the Two anointed ones” have power to “shut heaven as often as they will, and to smite the earth with all plagues.”* When the interceding Angel stands at the golden Altar in heaven, and offers up much incense, with the prayers of all saints, He takes “coals of fire from the altar and scatters them upon the seat of the beast—thus sending forth judgments through the antichristian earth.† This shows strikingly that the Mediator has respect to the prayers of his

* James v. ; Rev. xi.

† Rev. viii. 1.

people in all providential dispensations; and in answer to them, not unfrequently, He performs his strange work of judgment in the earth. For themselves, the saints have high delight and sweet enjoyment in marking the ways of Divine Providence towards themselves and others. “*Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord.*”* It has been justly remarked that providential movements are the “fulfilment of Scripture.” God’s people are frequently constrained to bear testimony that the providences of the Redeemer to them, whether prosperous or afflictive, are special and gracious—and, at the same time, that not one word that He has spoken has failed of accomplishment. On such a theme, they can never fail to expatiate with lively interest and satisfaction in their intercourse with one another. Hence they can gather matter of holy comfort and joy. Here, too, are presented the strongest motives for support, vigorous exertion, and animating hope.

In connexion with the providence of the Mediator, the saints can mark gracious answers of prayers, and they are encouraged to persevere in prayer and supplication for all saints. Consoled and elevated by holy converse on the providence and grace of the Redeemer, they pray unitedly and earnestly—“Thy kingdom come”—“When the Lord shall build up Zion, He will appear in his glory”—“He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer.”† Associations for united prayer and Christian converse, furnish favourable occa-

* Psalm cvii. 43.

† Psalm cii. 13.

sions for mutually devising and prosecuting plans for the advancement of Christ's kingdom in the earth. Fellowship-meetings are admirably fitted for promoting the great work of the world's conversion. The most happy results have already flowed from the "Missionary concerts" of united prayer. The salutary fruits would be still greater, if such re-unions of prayer were extended—if the whole Church were divided into small select societies of Christians living as brethren, and assembling together for the express object of giving the Lord no rest till He establish and make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.

6. The *spiritual experience of God's people* communicated to one another will form a fertile and profitable theme of converse—of mutual encouragement, exhortation, and prayer.

While it is freely admitted that Christians should never make their varying frames and feelings, either a ground of confidence, or of undue discouragement; and while we hold likewise that there may be danger in directing Christian intercourse exclusively or chiefly to internal emotions and states, and that the great truths of *objective* Christianity should form the principal matters of Christian fellowship, we hold, at the same time, that Christians in spiritual converse, may, and ought at times to give expression to the inmost thoughts of their hearts. They may tell of their fears and conflicts, and joys, and may support and encourage one another, by recounting the work of the Saviour's grace in their souls. This is unquestionably implied in the idea of Christian intercourse, which in its very nature must be fraternal, and sympathetic, and confidential. Thus believers

open their hearts to one another, and become the more endeared to each other, not only as fellow-travellers and partakers of the common salvation,—but also, as having the same griefs and sorrows—the same conflicts, supports and consolations. This is implied too in their being called to render mutual assistance in the spiritual warfare—the strong supporting the weak, bearing each other’s burdens—weeping with them that weep—and being joint helpers of each other’s joy. Christians, when speaking often one to another, are not only to converse in “psalms and hymns,”—celebrating the Divine character and works—but also in “spiritual songs”—making mention of their internal states, and of the work of the Spirit on their hearts.* In this spirit, the Psalmist invites the fearers of God to “come and hear;” and he will “tell what God has done for his soul.” In many of the inspired songs of Zion, which are employed in social worship, believers declare to God, and to one another, the spiritual experience of saints. The apostles, too, in writing by the Spirit to the Churches, not unfrequently relate their own experience—in deliverances wrought, spiritual graces exercised, conflicts engaged in, and assurances enjoyed,—as motives of exhortation, and encouragement to fellow-labourers in the spiritual warfare.

Freedom and cordiality of Christian intercourse appear therefore to demand that the people of God, when they meet together for social worship should, with humility and godly fear, make mention of the Lord’s dealings towards them—that they should tell of their supports and comforts—of their trials and

* Colossians iii. 17.

difficulties—of their hopes and prospects—and that they should bear testimony to God's faithfulness and the excellence of true religion—in administering direction and help to others, and in seeking an interest in mutual prayer and praise. The disciples journeying to Emmaus, when the Saviour had revealed his glory, and dispelled their darkness, compared their hearts' experience together—"Did not our hearts burn within us?"* When the Redeemer dismissed the cured demoniac of Decapolis, He commanded him—"Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee."† The "great things" that Christ has done for the soul, are especially to be told in the intercourse of fellow-Christians—that His kindness and truth may be enhanced—that those who are weak and doubting may be encouraged and strengthened—and that all may be led to walk worthy of Him who has called them out of darkness into his marvellous light. This interchange of believing experience when judiciously made, has been frequently a means of eminent blessing to God's people. Jonathan Edwards, in his "Narrative of the Revival of Religion in Northampton," states that the recounting of the Lord's work in one place, or in particular instances, often proved a means of revival in others. Such has been the experience of the Church in many other cases. At the memorable periods in these countries, when, among our Presbyterian forefathers, practical godliness flourished, it was customary for the members of prayer-meetings, in their intercourse,

* Luke xxiv. 32,

† Mark v. 19.

to submit "*cases of conscience*"—to ask counsel of brethren in relation to important steps in the conduct of life, and to solicit and set a high value upon intercessory prayer. A return to this primitive practice would tend to enliven the social fellowship-meeting and to attract to it serious persons—while brethren, thus interchanging gracious experiences, would learn the more to esteem, love, and sympathize with each other, and to realize the delightful communion of saints—travelling together through the wilderness—destined to come at length to the same happy home, when the remembrance and recital of former experiences will enhance their joys, and swell their praises throughout eternity.

Lastly. The *exalted state in glory* to which believers are travelling, will furnish to saints gathered together in Christ's name a lofty and inspiring subject of mutual converse and prayer.

Christians are born from above. True to their heavenly vocation, "they seek a city which hath foundations"—their affections are centred "on things above;" their "treasure is in heaven," and "their hearts" there also. Heaven is their predestined home, to which they are travelling through the world as a wilderness—and where "every one of them shall appear before the Lord at length." He in whose name they assemble for social worship is their "Father in heaven," and all the blessings that they seek for themselves and others, descend as the fertilizing rain from above. Their privilege even here is to come to "the heavenly Jerusalem," and to "sit together in heavenly places with Christ Jesus"—and their holy vocation, and all their duties and trials point to the celestial country as

their final blissful abode, as they are designed to prepare them for the inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. How sweet and elevating the thought that heaven is to the redeemed their Father's house, which Jesus, their Elder Brother, has gone to prepare for them! How blissful the assurance that He will come again and receive them to himself, that they may eternally be with him, beholding his glory—heirs and joint heirs with him of God! Believers thus called and privileged, have their “conversation in heaven;” and as all the work of grace, and all Divine providential dispensations tend to make them meet for glory, and ultimately to introduce them to its enjoyment, it is most natural that the heavenly state should not only largely engage their most solemn thoughts, and most ardent affections, but likewise that it should engross much of their converse, and of their united prayers and praises, and of their spiritual intercourse with one another. They are fellow-soldiers, fighting together the same fight of faith, and the palm of complete victory in heaven will be their common and glorious reward. They travel in company through the wilderness, and pass through Baca's vale, as they go on from strength to strength till every one appears before the Lord in Zion. Privileged to carry all their concerns to the Throne, and to expect all blessing from it, they feel it betimes, in their intercourse, to be profitable and delightful indeed, to be engaged in the exercises of conversing, praising, and praying together about the “city of habitation”—the heavenly inheritance. In such exercises, the trials of the wilderness are forgotten—their title to the bliss to be revealed is

rendered clear—their meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light is advanced—their views of the celestial city are expanded—their affections sublimated—and their energies are called forth to press forward to the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. What encouragement to perseverance in conflict and endurance in trial are furnished by the declaration,—“If we suffer with Christ, we shall also reign with him?” As rest succeeds labour, so in glory, “there remains a rest for the people of God.” The loved Lord of saints, whose they are and whom they serve, Himself says —“Him that overcometh will I give to sit with me on my throne, even as I have overcome and am set down with my Father upon his throne.”*

The *two* grand privileges which believers intensely desire—the attainment of holiness, and the gracious presence of Christ, are partly realized in the social prayer-meeting on earth; but their full enjoyment is reserved for heaven. There saints shall be perfect in holiness, as well as in knowledge and felicity, and they shall be ever with the Lord. There, too, the fellowship of the saints shall be perfect, glorious, and eternal. Sin and death enter not “the many-mansioned house” in glory, and there are no alienations, strifes, or separations any more for ever. There is “no night there;” but the Throne of God and of the Lamb is in it. God shall dwell among them, and his servants shall see his face, and their Father’s name shall be in their foreheads. With such wondrous prospects before them, it is every way to be expected that fellow-believers, in

* Revelation iii. 21.

their spiritual converse, should give expression to the joyful hope of heaven, and should encourage and animate one another to press forward to the glorious inheritance. All vain speculations about the locality of Paradise, or the circumstances of glorified spirits are unsuitable to such converse. But, like the pilgrims on the "Delectable Mountains," in hallowed fellowship-meetings, believers obtain, at times, enlivening views of the Celestial City; and as they love the scene of holy intercourse, they gird up their loins and run the faster. Waiting on the Lord, "they renew their strength—mount up with wings as eagles—run and are not weary—walk and are not faint."* In the words of a venerable servant of God, speaking of such intercourse—"Believers grow in the knowledge of heaven by the study of holiness, by the experience of communion with God, and in the enjoyment of the sweet fellowship of saints. By their heavenward faces they encourage one another—by their prayers, they obtain that holy help by which they are kept from fainting, and strengthened in their way—and by their songs, as strangers and pilgrims on the earth, they speed their way, and have foretastes of fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore, when their prayers shall be ended, and praise shall be their everlasting employment and delight."†

* Isaiah xi. 31.

† Private Social Prayer, by Andrew Symington, D.D.—p. 15.

CHAPTER V.

ADVANTAGES OF SOCIAL CONVERSE AND UNITED PRAYER.

WHILE the grand reason for observing any commanded duty is the authority of Him who has enjoined it, it has been justly observed that, in the way of obedience, benefits are enjoined which are in vain sought elsewhere. Ancient moralists have propounded the maxim—“*Virtue is its own reward.*” The clearer utterance of the Sacred Oracles is “*Wisdom’s ways are pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.*” “*Godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.*”

The ordinance of private Christian fellowship has *advantages* common to it with other religious ordinances; and it has some which are peculiar to itself. All institutions of our holy religion, appointed by its Divine Author, tend mutually to recommend and strengthen one another. They were ordained not only for the purpose of manifesting the Divine glory, but also to promote the best interests of the human being, and to advance his fellowship with God, the author of his existence. None of these ordinances is perfect without the others—none of them can be neglected or disregarded without incurring the risk of doing injury to

others, or of marring the benefit to be derived from them. As Christians are under the highest obligations to honour and submit to their Lord and Master in all things, so, as they have opportunity, should they wait upon all his institutions, that they may fully realize the benefits which they are separately, and in combination, fitted to confer—that vital religion may thus prosper among themselves and others, and that the Church, edified in holiness and comfort, may be advanced to her perfect state in glory.

The intercourse of Christians in stated assemblies for spiritual converse and united prayer, is more free and intimate than in some other associations; and being among a select number of Christians, continued at brief intervals, it possesses a character of variety and regularity which does not belong to other religious institutions. The Family government is in its nature *monarchical*, and the household consisting generally of the same individuals, even where love and wisdom reign, there is less variety, and in many instances less opportunity of inquiry and improvement than in the social prayer-meeting, where no individual claims or exercises superiority. In the public ordinances of the sanctuary, though Christians assemble together as brethren, to hear what God speaks, they are mixed with others unconverted, and who may even have made no open profession of religion. One is commissioned to instruct the assembly, and the duty of the congregation is to hear and receive the words of wisdom; and though the assembled worshippers offer up united prayers and praises, they do not enjoy that familiarity of intercourse which belongs to

select associations of fellow-travellers to Zion. Even when met together in the Banqueting-house, to enjoy the communion of the death of Christ, believers rather enjoy secret fellowship of spirit than the communion in which they are called to “speak often one to another”—to converse, and pray, and sing spiritual songs together. A select society of devout worshippers, meeting regularly, brings with it something different from, and in some respect *above* any of these. The freedom and openness of intercourse which characterize it, afford to its members the fullest opportunity of heart communing with heart; and privileges shared in common are enhanced and increased. When two real Christians walk together agreed, possessed of the same precious faith, and animated by the same lively hope, their intercourse is most sweet and profitable. Yet the stated fellowship-meeting, in some respects, surpasses this. Greater fulness and variety of Christian experience is contributed for mutual edification, support, and comfort; the heart is enlarged, as the circle of Christian friendship is expanded, and there is a larger room provided for the operation of Christian sympathy and affection, and a wider range afforded for the exercise of all the social and benevolent feelings. Among the advantages of social prayer-meetings may be mentioned,

First—*The diversified spiritual gifts of the members of the Church are combined for mutual profit.* The manifold wisdom of the Holy Spirit is displayed in the different gifts which He has imparted to the servants of God—distributing to every man according to his several ability. “Unto every one is given grace, according to the measure

of the gift of Christ.” Even in a small and select association of Christians, variety of gifts is observable. One is endowed with superior intellect, another is distinguished for fervid affections—one has a retentive memory—another a ready utterance—and one is characterized by fluency and fulness in the gift of prayer. While some are suited to instruct, or to warn, exhort, and reprove, others are peculiarly qualified to strengthen the weak and impart consolation to mourners. This variety of spiritual gifts is not conferred for individual use, but for the benefit of the community. Like the members of the natural body, each member of the spiritual society is designed to serve another; and his several gifts are bestowed on the believer mainly for this purpose.

The social prayer-meeting is an institution eminently fitted to render available for the common good all the separate and distinguished gifts of Christ’s servants. With brethren dwelling in unity, and assembling together where Christ, their exalted King, has promised to be, no member is useless, no gift which the Spirit has imparted is superfluous. What is lacking in one is supplied by the abundance of others; and what to the individual may appear of little benefit, may become subservient to general edification. The very existence of a diversity of spiritual gifts would seem to demand an appropriate sphere for their exercise; and this is admirably supplied in the association for spiritual converse and united prayer. Here no talent is allowed to go to waste, or to be laid up in a napkin. Christians gathered together are bound to exhort, edify, support, and comfort one another. “As

every man has received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."* The judicious remark of Dr. Owen, in his "Treatise on Spiritual Gifts," is that when gifts are employed for the ends for which they were conferred, they are increased; whereas, if their proper use is neglected, they are taken away. How important, then, is the institution, which is specially fitted to call forth into exercise spiritual gifts, and at the same time to improve their possessor and to benefit others! All past experience attests that Christians, delighting in select associations for prayer and spiritual converse, have themselves thereby grown in grace, and in the knowledge of Christ; while the Church, in the diligent observance of such an institution, has been edified and comforted.

Secondly—*The preservation, increase, and diffusion of religious knowledge* are peculiarly promoted by private Christian fellowship.

Of the last blissful days of the Gospel dispensation, it is declared that "They shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for all shall know Him, from the least to the greatest."† This cheering announcement implies that up till that joyful consummation, Christians are employed in diffusing the knowledge of God, and that they are engaged each in instructing his neighbour in Divine things. This is the unquestionable duty of all who have received the knowledge of the truth—

* 1 Peter v. 10.

† Heb. viii. 11.

but a duty which, at the same time, is sadly overlooked and neglected. Social private fellowship furnishes an appropriate means for its performance; and recourse must be had to such an institution, if religious knowledge would either be preserved, increased, or more widely diffused. Even among those who have been instructed in Divine things, religious knowledge will diminish, if the mind is not frequently exercised in contemplation on spiritual subjects, and if no or few opportunities are enjoyed of applying to practical purposes the knowledge acquired. Stated meetings of Christians for spiritual converse and united prayer prevent this declension, and serve to increase the desire after religious knowledge and to further its acquisition. The faculties of the mind are called into exercise, in connexion with the most important of all subjects. Divine truths are investigated and more clearly seen; things already known are called to remembrance, and the desire is excited after higher attainments.

The Social Prayer-meeting embraces in its membership persons of different standing in the school of Christ—some fathers, some young men, and some babes in Christ. How lovely is it to behold these, according to their several capacities, and in their several places, mutual instructors of each other! The aged believer imparting to the young and inexperienced matured views of the truths of revelation, and of God's good ways; and the young sitting at the feet of fathers to be taught the pleasant ways of wisdom, and themselves at times imparting a stimulus to advanced Christians, by their warm affections and ardent zeal in the cause of religion!

Thus knowledge of the most valuable kind is increased and diffused. It is well known that, for practical purposes, conversation is the most effective method of dispelling obscurity, rectifying mistakes, and leading to sound and enlarged views. When such conversation is with those who have applied the truths about which they speak to the conduct of life, and have had experience of their power to direct, and comfort, and bless; and when it is carried on in connexion with solemn approaches to the throne of grace, by persons sitting at the feet of the Great Teacher, it must be of no ordinary value. "*The lips of the wise disperse knowledge,*" and "*the ear of the wise seeketh knowledge.*" Select passages of the word read and heard,—the songs of Zion sung, in strains inspired by the Spirit, meditation on spiritual truths, and Christian conversation, cannot but be highly conducive to instruction; and by such means, the light of religious knowledge continues to shine brightly in the Church, and to advance, notwithstanding the world's darkness.

In the Social Prayer-meeting, there are peculiar facilities for cultivating and extending religious knowledge. Such associations assemble regularly and frequently, the members are on the most intimate terms with one another, as the exercises in which they engage call them to the attentive and diligent study of the truths of the word. There is full scope allowed for the most familiar intercourse. Particular inquiries are encouraged; and brethren feel themselves bound to endeavour to solve them, and thus to instruct and edify one another. Thus doubts are obviated, difficulties removed, and mis-

takes corrected. The young and inexperienced are nourished up in “the words of faith and good doctrine;” and even aged and venerable disciples make progress in the knowledge of Divine things, and are enabled to rejoice, while cultivating Christian fellowship, that their views are enlarged—their consolations are made to abound, and their prospects of the attainment of perfect knowledge and happiness become brighter.

It is worthy of remark, too, as confirming this view of the advantage of Private Christian Fellowship, that in all scriptural efforts for diffusing the knowledge of Divine truth, either at home or abroad, recourse is had either directly to this ordinance, or to something that nearly resembles it. Those who send missionaries abroad, to Jew or Gentile, resort to social prayer and spiritual converse, in making the appointment and designation, while the labourers in dark places of the earth confess the value of the “*concert*” for united prayer, and besides, hail opportunities of meeting with fellow-labourers, or with converts for the same hallowed exercises. When, moreover, the thick darkness which broods over the neglected masses of the population of our larger towns is attempted to be dispelled, the humble labourer finds it important not only to teach from house to house, but also to collect into little assemblies for prayer and familiar converse, those who are willing to receive his instructions. By these means, the weak glimmerings of light spread and increase, souls are rescued from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son, and even amid the hopeless outcasts of soci-

ety, not a few are brought to rejoice in the light of salvation.*

Thirdly, **MUTUAL FAITHFUL EXHORTATION**, and the consequent *spiritual protection and welfare* of Christians is another important result of private Christian fellowship. Christians in the present world, are exposed to manifold trials and temptations. They are but imperfectly sanctified, and so have yielding principles within, ever ready to comply with the suggestions of the Tempter. The heart is "deceitful above all things." Hence Chris-

* One of the most striking and cheering examples of the happy effects of the aggressive influence of Christianity is furnished by the Institution of **TOWN MISSIONS**, established for reclaiming the neglected masses of the population of cities and large towns. This truly valuable society first commenced its operations in these countries in Glasgow, in the year 1825, and owes its existence to the self-denying labours of the late lamented **DAVID NASMITH**. About the same time, without any concert with Mr. Nasmith, the author of this work, who had for a considerable period previously, earnestly desired to set on foot some agency for meeting the spiritual wants of larger towns, was instrumental in originating the *Belfast Town Mission*. It is gratifying to notice the existence of similar institutions, not only in many of the large towns of these kingdoms, but likewise in America, and in various parts of the continent of Europe. The *London City Mission*, with its 250 agents, and an annual income of £30,000, conducted on a truly Christian and Catholic basis, and receiving from some of the highest civil functionaries of the land, attestations of its extensive usefulness, is a noble instance of the valuable fruits that result from attempts to honour God, and benefit souls, that are made from small beginnings. We have no doubt that Town Missions properly conducted, revealing the wants of the neglected masses of the population, and at the same time, exhibiting the success of Christian efforts for their moral and spiritual improvement, will yet lead to extensive and vigorous attempts for the amelioration of the millions in Christian lands, who are living without God, and sunk in moral and physical wretchedness. In all such exertions, the Prayer-Meeting is found to be indispensable, both to originate and carry forward successfully the benevolent undertaking. Such as would desire full information on the working of Town Missions will derive many valuable hints by perusing—"Vanderkiste's Six Years' Labour among the Dens of London," "The Missionary of Kilmany,"—and the reports of the "London City Mission."

tians need at all times holy vigilance; and they are reminded that their constant duty is to “watch and pray that they enter not into temptation.” Frequent and familiar intercourse with fellow-saints is of eminent advantage in guarding against temptation, or in delivering from its power. It has been justly remarked that the first onset of the tempter was made upon the woman when *alone*—and that our Lord himself was taken to a scene of solitude to be tempted of the devil. In spiritual conflicts, it has been often found that it was not good for a Christian to be alone. Here “two are better than one. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow; but wo to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up.”* In temptations that expose to outward evils, the companionship and faithful admonition of Christian brethren is often invaluable. The mind is thus impressed with salutary fear of sin; the sense of Christian obligation is increased—and the very thought of acting unworthy of the fellowship of the faithful, or of bringing reproach upon the Christian name, serves to fortify against the assaults of the destroyer, and to turn away the heart from scenes and occasions of temptation. And in certain internal and powerful temptations—as the risings of unbelief—the workings of carnal or sensual imaginations—and the gloomy forebodings of despair, private Christian fellowship is a means frequently blessed of the Lord, to relieve the distressed, and to impart light and peace to them that sit disconsolate in darkness and in the shadow of death. As when David play-

* Ecclesiastes iv. 9, 10.

ed before the king of Israel, the “evil spirit from the Lord” was dispossessed, and the mind of the monarch restored to tranquillity, so the words of affectionate Christian converse, and the voice of united prayer and praise have often dispelled thick clouds, and restored to the wounded in spirit, “the joys of God’s salvation.” In view of such temptations, and of mutual exhortation being an eminent means of deliverance, we are directed by the Spirit — *“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you, an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.”**

The faithful counsels and earnest prayers of brethren, assembled in the Prayer-meeting, have been a safe-guard to not a few of the young; and have been a preventive to many others, keeping them from the path of the destroyer. It is true that it is the Watchman of Israel who never slumbers or sleeps, who can alone effectually keep the feet of his people; but fellow-Christians are under Him an instrumentality which He extensively owns and honours. Every believer is designed to be his “brother’s keeper,” and the association of brethren dwelling in unity, renewing their strength by spiritual converse, and waiting at the Throne of grace, is a defence which frequently proves too strong for temptations from without or from within, to break down or remove. When persons yield to temptation, it has been observed that they forsake the assembling of themselves together. In the communion of the

* Hebrews iii. 12, 13.

faithful they were safe. So soon as this is slighted or forsaken, their defence is departed, and they are ready to fall into the hands of the destroyer, and to be overcome of evil.

In cases in which brethren have been surprised and have fallen under temptation, private Christian fellowship has often been a happy means of recovering those that have fallen, and of joyful restoration. Christians have learned to be deeply concerned about erring brethren, and fervent prayers, individual and united, have been offered for their recovery. Considering themselves as likewise exposed to temptation, and that they stand only by faith, they have learned to restore such in the spirit of meekness. The display of fraternal concern and affection often melts the heart of the wanderer. The penitent is disburdened of his distress, in confessing his fault to sorrowing and sympathizing brethren; and the charity, that with its mantle of love, covers a multitude of sins, exults in a restored soul saved from death—in a prodigal restored again to his Father's house.

Though Christians, it must be confessed, frequently fail in displaying a forgiving spirit, and a yearning solicitude for the safety or recovery of brethren exposed to temptation, yet the duties to which we have referred are in themselves all-important; and when properly performed, are of singular use in the fellowship of the Church. Brotherly counsel and meek and faithful reproof have preserved many from falling: and the warm Christian love that dictates them has provided a refuge for the wanderer, and has administered to the heart-broken penitent strong consolation. Associations for united prayer and

spiritual converse supply a valuable means for the exercise of these gracious principles and feelings, and the due performance of these duties; and they are therefore calculated to subserve eminently useful purposes to the church in all ages. Not unfrequently has it been observed that those who love the Prayer-meeting have been kept, when, in an hour of temptation, error and apostacy prevail; while, on the other hand, those who comply with “the spirit of the times,” and “fall away from their steadfastness,” give plain evidence of their defection, by discontinuing their attendance upon the assembly for Christian fellowship.* Christians should therefore learn not to “forsake the assembling of themselves together, as the manner of some is; but should exhort one another; and so much the more as they see the day approaching.” The promise is large and all-encouraging, “Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.”†

* A notable illustration of the remark in the text occurs in what is recorded of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland at the era of the Revolution. Those who carefully maintained the ordinance of Private Social Fellowship, preserved among them purity of doctrine—a testimony for precious truth, and godly practice; and their successors have done so till the present day: whereas those who forsook the assembling of themselves together, and fell in with the Revolution Church, not only abandoned the testimony of their fathers, but opened a wide door for the admission of grievous error in doctrine, laxity of discipline, and irreligious practice. Recent movements in Ecclesiastical Bodies, both in these countries and in America, supply illustrations which should be carefully considered, of the connexion between the observance of private Christian fellowship, and the maintenance of sound doctrine, and godly practice—and show likewise that neglect of private social prayer leads to departure from the faith and declension in godliness.

† Heb. x. 25; Revelation iii. 10.

Fourthly—*The spirit of true piety and devotion is nourished and strengthened by the exercises of private Christian fellowship.*

Vigorous piety is of great importance to the profession and prosperity of the Church, and to the best interests of her individual members. It is possible to have an orthodox creed, and yet be destitute of real piety. An individual may have a lamp and no oil in the vessel—"a form of godliness without its power;" and a church may have a name to live, and yet be dead, or may have "things which remain, and which are ready to die." Such a state is most dangerous; and if it continues, the consequences must be, beyond expression, fearful. Every thing should be done to prevent it; and all appointed means should be resorted to, that religion in its power may prevail in the communion of the Church. While it is the gracious presence of the Redeemer in ordinances, and the power of the Spirit alone, that can confer spiritual life in the Church, or continue and increase it; there are certain divinely-appointed means, which are adapted to call into exercise devotional feelings, and to promote the cause of vital godliness. Of these a high place must be assigned to intercourse with lively Christians, and to societies for spiritual converse and united prayer. "*Iron sharpeneth iron, so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.*" Even occasional conversation with a prayerful, spiritual-minded person, will often make a deep impression of the importance of Divine things, and will stimulate to the exercises of devotion. Who has not felt, when privileged with enjoying the company of a decided Christian, as if breathing for the time a

purser atmosphere; and after retiring from it, who has not been sensible of the awful power and attractive sweetness of real holiness?

In the stated Fellowship Meeting, religious knowledge is presented not in the abstract form, or as matter of speculative belief merely, but as intended to affect and purify the heart, as the food and life of the soul, and as supplying copious matter for prayer and praise to devout worshippers. All the exercises of these associations are fitted to fan the flame of intelligent piety, and to promote true devotion. Meeting with brethren who cherish mutual lively affection, and who have confidence in each other, has a solemnizing and animating effect. The reading of God's word in company, and in portions chosen with reference to the circumstances of assembled brethren; and the joint confessions, supplications, and thanksgivings of brethren, who are of one heart and one mind, eminently conduce to elevate the heart, and to lead to a higher measure of spirituality and devotion. Here *the sympathy of numbers* gathered together in pursuit of the most important objects, acts most advantageously; and the united petitions of devout worshippers are wafted on high, and come into God's holy temple. The showers of blessing which they draw down often water and refresh the heritage of the Lord. The social prayer-meeting is singularly adapted to withdraw the mind of those who attend it, from the engrossing pursuits and cares of the world. It comes in as a blessed means of calling away the mind and heart to seek "those things which are above;" and its hallowed exercises enable the Christian to overcome the world, and to go on through

the wilderness "leaning on the Beloved." Every part of this delightful service seems as if specially provided to fan the flame of pure and heavenly devotion, and to promote abiding healthful piety in the life and conduct.

The experience of the Church in all past ages has proved that associations for private Christian fellowship have eminently tended to cherish and increase the piety of their members. Wherever they have existed and been diligently attended, vital religion has flourished; and those who delighted in them have been generally distinguished for activity and energy in religion. To the fellowship Meeting, beyond question, those sections of the Church that have maintained this institution, have been largely indebted for the existence and vigour of piety exhibited by their members. The fire enkindled on this altar has continued to burn from generation to generation; and when other portions of the Christian community have declined in doctrine and practice, pure and undefiled religion has kept pace with this excellent ordinance. All past history warrants the conclusion that the revival and extension of associations for private Christian fellowship would greatly contribute to the promotion of true devotion and genuine piety.

Fifthly, The Private Fellowship Meeting tends powerfully to minister support and comfort to Christians in trials, and leads to a faithful discharge of all the duties which are dictated by brotherly love.

The people of God are in a world where evil abounds, and they are reminded that in it they shall have tribulation. The afflictions that befall them

arise from various sources, and to them not unfrequently is allotted more than an ordinary share of bodily or mental suffering. Besides the assurance that to the saints trouble is unsting— that to them it is a part of the dispensation of the covenant of peace, and a token of Fatherly love, there are *two* principal grounds of support and consolation to them under affliction. These are, *First*, The presence and sympathy of Christ, their Elder Brother—and *Secondly*, The sympathy of fellow-Christians with them in trials. Of the Saviour, in relation to the sufferings of his people, it was declared long before He came in the flesh, “In all their affliction He was afflicted;”^{*} and now that his great work on earth has been finished, his unchangeable character is proclaimed—“He can have a fellow-feeling for our infirmities, for He was in all points tempted (tried) as we are, yet without sin.”[†]

The sympathy of real Christians one with another is intimate and tender, powerful and lasting. It springs from their union to the same glorious Head, and from their incorporation into one mystical spiritual body—“We are members one of another.” “If one member suffers, all the rest suffer with it; and if one rejoice, all rejoice together.” The expression of this sympathy has ever been sweet to the wounded and tried spirit—potent to assuage grief and to impart holy consolation. While it must in the nature of the case exist, among all who belong to the family of God, there is need of a special provision for its appropriate and vigorous exercise. This is found in select associations for Chris-

^{*} Isaiah lxiii. 9.

[†] Hebrews iv. 15.

tian fellowship. Frequenting these assemblies, Christians become familiarly known to one another, and they are united more closely in the bonds of sanctified and endeared friendship. Their individual wants, trials, and conflicts become known to beloved brethren; and they feel it to be no common privilege to unbosom their sorrows to those who regard it as their solemn duty to "bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." Then to be remembered in prayer by fellow-saints is a great support under trial; and the words which are spoken by those who have been themselves in trouble, and their fervent intercessions, are as balm to the afflicted spirit—if they do not remove the trial, they tend greatly to alleviate it. It has been observed that when Prayer-meetings are conducted in a lively manner, the afflicted and mourners cling, in times of distress, to brethren with whom they have had sweet fellowship in the social assembly; and these again manifest more than an ordinary portion of Christian affection, by their attention to the sorrowful and the afflicted. After seasons of affliction too, and when trials have passed away, believers return to the assembly for prayer and spiritual converse with peculiar desire and delight. Like good Hezekiah, they have sought of the Lord a "sign" whereby they may go up—not only to the Sanctuary—but likewise to the place of united prayer and praise. As the Apostles, when they were injuriously treated by the Jewish rulers, and dismissed from the tribunal, went to their "own company;" and invited brethren to rejoice with them, that they were accounted "worthy to suffer shame for the name's sake of Jesus," so the saints, in repairing to the social prayer-

meeting, to give thanks for deliverances received, return *to their company*; and their praises are more cordial and elevated, that other dear brethren join them in the song of gratitude. At the deathbed itself, the members of the Prayer-meeting gather together, as friends united in Christ so as never to part; and when death dissolves their fellowship on earth, survivors are enabled to cherish the enlivening hope that they will shortly realize with departed friends a loftier communion in glory which shall know no change or termination. As it is recorded of the proto-martyr Stephen that "devout men carried him to his burial, and made great lamentation over him," so not unfrequently, the chief mourners at the funeral of a saint are the brethren of the same prayer-meeting. While to the opened grave they commit all that is earthly of a departed friend, in certain hope of a blessed resurrection, they learn themselves to live more amid the realities of the world to come; and the Fellowship Meeting is endeared to them as a precious institution in which believers are trained for the inheritance in glory, and in which they were animated to follow them who now "through faith and patience inherit the promises." The power of Christian principle and sympathy operates too in these associations, to lead to the faithful and active discharge of all other duties of Christian fellowship. Believers learn to love one another with a pure heart fervently; and "as the elect of God, to put on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, gentleness, long-suffering."

Sixthly.—These associations tend to excite and increase a *public* and *liberal spirit*.

Vigorous and influential piety is always indicated

by a public spirit and by Christian liberality. The love of Christ *constrains* its subjects to live not to themselves. True Christianity elevates those who feel its power above low selfish aims and pursuits—and leads them to adopt as the motto of their character and life, “NONE OF US LIVETH TO HIMSELF, AND NO MAN DIETH TO HIMSELF.”* The advancement of the Redeemer’s glory in the earth—the promotion of Zion’s good—and the benefit of fellow-men are objects which appear to the true believer of paramount and unspeakable importance—far above any mere personal interest of his own. Hence he labours to “do good as he has opportunity.” In the fellowship of the Church, he learns to weep with them that weep, and to rejoice with them that rejoice. Desiring above all the revival and prosperity of the Church, he can make the avowal, “*If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.*”† This public spirit embraces the whole interests of the Redeemer’s glory, and impels those who feel its power to labour, and expend worldly means and make sacrifices for the relief of the distressed, and for the promotion of the cause of truth and righteousness in the earth. Its appropriate exercise is a source of happiness. In devising “liberal things,” the “liberal soul” is, in terms of the Divine assurance, “made fat,” and the experience is realized—“IT IS MORE BLESSED TO GIVE THAN TO RECEIVE.” Whatever tends to impress upon Christians the great

* Romans xiv. 7.

† Ps. cxxxvii. 5, 6.

truth that *they are not their own*, and that *they are not to live to themselves*; whatever excites them to Christian liberality is to them of eminent advantage, as it raises them above the natural selfishness of the heart—exemplifies the power and excellence of our holy religion—and fits them for co-operating in the Saviour's designs of mercy and love towards our world. In all past ages, it has been by means of public-spirited and liberal men that the cause of philanthropy has been advanced—that the Church has been revived, extended, and built up, and that the Saviour's glory has been promoted in the earth. Thus, too, we have reason to think, the cause of true religion will achieve her ultimate glorious triumphs. Men of an enlarged public spirit will be raised up—a devoted instrumentality will go forth to the work of the Lord, and the offerings of Christian liberality will be greatly increased, in the approaching era of Zion's brightness and glory.

Fellowship Meetings have a manifest tendency to excite and invigorate this spirit—thereby furnishing another proof that they are inseparably connected with a healthy tone of genuine piety. Christians in this ordinance are drawn closely together. Intelligence is circulated concerning the cause of true religion in the earth; and the public interests of the Church—her spiritual condition, her revival and extension naturally claim a prominent place in the converse and united prayers of God's people. The members are thus brought to feel that they have an individual and very deep interest in all that pertains to the cause of genuine religion and philanthropy. In the day of trial to the Church, they sustain each other's drooping spirits, remembering and pleading the Di-

vine promises; and then and at other times, the hearts of the faithful are comforted and encouraged by the prospects of Zion's future enlargement and glory. The dispositions excited and cherished in these associations serve signally to promote the cause of truth and godliness. Believers are united in the common belief of the truth—the heart is warmed and elevated in Christian affection—and the active powers are stimulated to the pursuit of worthy and ennobling objects.

In point of fact, the Fellowship Prayer-meeting has ever been an eminent means of cultivating a public spirit, and of exciting to holy liberality. In apostolic times, primitive believers abounding in united prayer, overcame the world, and were distinguished for self-denied liberality and holy devotedness. In the fresh impulse of their first love, none of them said that aught of the things he possessed was his own, but *they had all things common*. Disregarding ease and earthly possessions, and life itself, they became the honoured instruments of diffusing the Saviour's light and salvation throughout the nations. In other ages too, the social Prayer-meeting has called into exercise a like public liberal spirit, and has led to similar zealous, self-denied exertions for the propagation of truth. Modern missionary efforts have, to a great extent, originated in meetings for united prayer, and mutual Christian converse: and the liberality with which evangelical missions have been sustained is the fruit of such associations. Christians who take delight in associating with fellow-believers for stated prayer, very generally excel others in the manifestation of a public and liberal spirit. Members of the Church, even

in an humble rank of life, frequenting these meetings, have learned to carry away from them a heartfelt concern about the state of religion in the Church—to contribute cheerfully, and to put forth strenuous exertions for the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom in the earth. The author has had frequent opportunities of marking with interest this display of a public spirit, in connexion with the hallowed exercises of the Prayer-meeting. From close and extensive observation, he considers himself warranted to say that he has never known any who gave clear evidence of receiving spiritual benefit from the fellowship-meeting, and of imparting it to others—who were not at the same time characterized by a public spirit, and who were not ready on befitting occasions to show Christian liberality.*

Finally.—The Fellowship Meeting has *a happy influence upon all other religious duties*, public and private, personal and relative.

While every duty of religion properly performed

* The instances are not few, and they afford the most pleasing remembrance, in which members of the social Prayer-meeting, —male and female, and some of them in very humble circumstances of life, in connexion with his own flock, have shown, in the best sense of the phrase, a public spirit, and given singular proofs of Christian liberality. So marked and observable has been the influence of these associations in maintaining this spirit, that the writer has been accustomed to look chiefly to those who delighted in the prayer-meeting and were profitable members of it—to evince a lively interest in the Church's welfare—the conversion of the nations and the relief of the distressed; and from such he has ever calculated on receiving for these objects the spontaneous fruits of Christian liberality. Does not such experience supply a powerful motive to ministers and Christian philanthropists to promote the establishment of Fellowship Meetings; and to labour to render this ordinance, where it has been established, eminent for holy zeal, and instinct with spiritual vigour? If we would desire to see prevailing in the Church healthful piety, we must contribute our utmost endeavours to unite its members in fellowship-meetings, and to enkindle the spirit of fraternal affection, and holy zeal, in this association.

has a favourable effect upon all others, united prayer has a special and most salutary influence. Private prayer and devout meditation on the word prepare for fellowship with Christian brethren; and this again sends the believer back, with enlarged views and desires of heart, to enjoy in the closet the sweets of communion with God, and to pour out his heart at the Mercy-seat. Difficulties that had been felt in secret, and doubts and fears that had oppressed the mind are dispelled by means of spiritual converse; and the Christian counsels, and fervent prayers of brethren help the traveller to Zion to go on his way rejoicing. How frequently has the happy influence of the prayer-meeting been felt on the family! Believing parents, taking with them their children—and feeling in their intercourse with brethren that their oases and those of their families were subjects of affectionate interest and earnest prayer with others, have returned with joy to bless their household—and with renewed confidence and hope, to perform domestic duties, and endure domestic trials. When deeply concerned about the spiritual interests of their children, how often have the hearts of godly fathers and mothers been strengthened and encouraged by knowing, as they attended on the prayer-meeting, that believing brethren were bearing their burdens, and were wrestling in prayer in behalf of those who were to them objects of heartfelt anxiety! Who can tell, moreover, how many wayward and backsliding children have been reclaimed in answer to such prayers, or how many of Zion's children have by such means become partakers of the grace that bringeth salvation!

The influence of social prayer upon *the public*

ordinances of religion has often been most salutary and powerful. The joint supplications of two or three meeting in Christ's name, excite desires after the privileges of the Sanctuary, and at the same time form a suitable preparation for their enjoyment. Christian conversation brings out the sweetness and fulness of the word—fixes it in the remembrance of the heart—and leads to receive it with quickened appetite and relish from the lips of the Lord's messenger. The prayers of the assembled people of God are of special benefit to the ministers of the word. In the Fellowship Meeting, the public servants of God are particularly remembered in prayer; and many fervent petitions are offered up in their behalf. Ministers when present have had their minds solemnized—and while made to feel in connexion with such exercises, the awful importance and responsibility of their office and work, they have, at the same time, received encouragement and renewed strength for their arduous service. Often, too, when engaged in the work of the sanctuary, and enduring the anxieties and trials of the ministry, they have been sustained and comforted in knowing that an attached people were pouring out fervent and united prayers on their behalf—they have been led to expect the blessing that was sought for them so earnestly in the public assemblies of God's people.

It was, doubtless, under the conviction of the value of such united spiritual prayers, and of their connection with the success of the word, that the Apostle Paul said once and again in writing to the Churches—"Brethren, pray for us." "Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course

and be glorified.” “Now, I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ’s sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayer to God for me.”* If an Apostle, who enjoyed the inspiration and infallible guidance of the Spirit, confessed his need of help from the prayers of the brotherhood of faith, how much more should ministers of the word now feel their value and earnestly solicit them! The direction and support of ministers—their comfort and progress in study—and the success of the messages they deliver, are greatly dependent on this instrumentality. The design for which united prayer is sought for the ministry, how momentous!—“**THAT THE WORD OF THE LORD MAY HAVE FREE COURSE AND BE GLORIFIED.**” Thus is a “door of utterance” opened, and a “door of entrance administered.” The seed sown falls into hearts prepared as good ground—the dews of the Spirit descend, and water it—and in due time, it springs up and bears plentiful fruit, to the honour of the Great Husbandman.

Numerous are the instances on record in which the salutary effects of united prayer have been felt and acknowledged, in directing and sustaining in other important duties. In periods of revival, this connexion has been eminently conspicuous. At the memorable era of the Second Reformation in Scotland, we are told that at the celebrated Glasgow Assembly of 1638, ALEXANDER HENDERSON, who, as moderator, guided with such wisdom and firmness the deliberations, was accustomed, often, after presiding during the day, to spend a considerable por-

* 1 Thess. v. 23; 2 Thess. iii. 1; Romans xv. 30.

tion of the night with brethren of a like spirit in prayer and consultation about the interests of Zion. From these nocturnal prayer-meetings, he doubtless derived renewed strength for his arduous public duties, and through this channel descended a remarkable blessing upon the proceedings of this admirable Assembly. The biographer of WHITEFIELD relates that, at the time of his greatest success in London, after preaching—sometimes twice and thrice in the day, he frequently spent time till a late hour of the night, in united prayer, with the awakened and Christian brethren at the Tabernacle. Who can tell how much the display of Divine power that took place under Whitefield's ministry, was the fruit of these fervent prayers—his own, and those of others who co-operated with him in his important mission ?

Within the last fifty years, when the adherents of a covenanted testimony in the south of Scotland, were accustomed to collect together from great distances to communions, it was usual for the various Prayer-meetings of which scattered congregations were composed, to meet on Friday, immediately after the day of fasting,—not unfrequently in a field in the open air, and after spending some time, in separate groups, in united prayer and other religious exercises, a minister or licentiate came forth in the evening and preached to the societies, then gathered into one assembly. The testimony of aged members of the Church is that these services were singularly refreshing, and were often eminently blessed, as a means of preparation for the holy solemnity. The practice still followed of the different Fellowship Meetings of the congregations of the Covenanting

Church in the north of Ireland convening for special prayer and spiritual converse, on a similar occasion, has been felt to have a happy influence on all the succeeding services. Such instances—and many similar might be added—go to prove that, for quickening and comfort in all religious duties, and for bringing forth and maturing the profitable fruits of righteousness, social private prayer has ever been an eminent instrumentality.*

* It is related that when Lord Cornwallis was in command of the army in Ireland, at the period of the Irish Rebellion of 1798, a pious soldier was brought before him, for disobeying the orders of an inferior officer by attending prayer-meetings among his fellow-soldiers at a late hour at night. Instead of reprimanding him, the general asked him to pray in his presence; and when the soldier, nothing confounded, gave utterance to the feelings of his heart in prayer, he dismissed him with the remark that as he was so conscientious in attending to his religious duties, he was sure he would not fail in his duty to his king and country, and with expressing at the same time his desire that he had many such soldiers in his army. Of those who displayed the most intrepid valour in the campaign now in the CRIMEA, it is pleasing to record that not a few, both soldiers and officers, have been accustomed to associate together for united prayer. The *Ninety-Third Regiment* distinguished themselves and suffered severely at the battle of Alma;—and many of them, while in Scotland, it is said, were members of prayer-meetings and teachers in the Sabbath School. The value of Christian fellowship was felt and confessed by them, on the battle field and amid scenes of carnage. For striking instances of the influence of united prayer upon other duties—sometimes difficult and perilous—see an excellent little work by the late Dr. Innes of Edinburgh, entitled, “*The Church in the Army.*”

CHAPTER VI.

RULES FOR ORGANIZING AND CONDUCTING FELLOWSHIP MEETINGS.

FROM the views that have been advanced in the preceding chapters, we may assume that the Scriptural obligation of private Christian fellowship is admitted; and that the *advantages* to be derived from such association are seen to be excellent and manifold. If the sentiments which have been propounded are accordant with the dictates of inspiration, then it concerns all who desire the prevalence of true religion, to adopt *practical* measures for the revival and general observance of an ordinance which has distinguished the Church in her purest and best days, and which is uniformly represented in the Divine word, as intimately connected with the future glory of the Redeemer's kingdom.

A MANUAL for the proper management of Fellowship-Meetings is at present required in the Church, as its judicious use would be calculated to subserve important purposes. Some may admit the principles which have been elucidated, who may yet find difficulties in their application. There are others who, convinced of the value of the prayer-meeting, set themselves to originate observances which bear some resemblance to the Scriptural institute, while yet important parts of the ordinance

are overlooked and neglected, and the desired objects are not attained.

The Rules which are subjoined cannot lay claim to express Scriptural sanction, nor are they offered, as applicable in every particular to the management of Fellowship Meetings, in all circumstances, and wherever they may be established. They appear, however, to be recommended by Christian prudence, as accordant with the nature and design of the institution,—and as a proper application of the principles which regulate its organization and establishment. They are based upon the admitted principle that ‘there are circumstances in the government and worship of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the word, which are always to be observed:’ and they are recommended, as having been tested by Christian experience. While other ways of promoting associations for united prayer in the Church have very generally failed, the observance of these Rules has contributed not only to maintain Christian fellowship in circumstances of difficulty and trial, but has likewise been a means of realizing the blessing connected with the institution. A full Directory for Fellowship Meetings is a desideratum. To present this, however, would be inconsistent with the design and limits of this work: instead, we submit a brief compend of practical Rules, which, it is presumed, will be found serviceable in promoting an organization of singular value throughout the Church.

GENERAL DIRECTIONS.*

I.—ORGANIZATION OF THE FELLOWSHIP MEETING.

1. Practical obedience to the Saviour's new commandment should be assumed as the basis of all Fellowship Meetings; and in the spirit of it, are they to be conducted. For exemplifying to the world the love of true disciples, and as an eminent means of cultivating the love of the brethren, they should be established. Christians are thus to receive one another in love, for the glory of Christ, and for their mutual comfort and profit.

2. Wherever Christians holding the same views of truth and Christian duty, are in Divine providence brought together—even where no congregation has been organized—they should form among themselves a stated social prayer-meeting. This has frequently proved a happy means of spiritual edification, and has led, in many cases, to the organization of congregations for public worship, and to the establishment of a stated ministry. Among emigrants in distant lands—and converts from corrupt and idolatrous systems—and in places where a faithful profession and godly practice are little

* These Directions are, to a considerable extent, selected from a "Short Directory for Religious Societies," "Drawn up by the appointment of the Reformed Presbytery, in 1782," which has long been in the hands of the members of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in this country—and from a "Guide to Private Social Worship," prepared by the late Dr Andrew Symington, D.D., by appointment of the Reformed Presbyterian Synod in Scotland. In these little works, the nature and obligations of Fellowship Meetings are well illustrated. We have aimed to simplify the arrangement of the "Directions," and to apply the principles to cases which are at present of great practical importance.

known, such an association is calculated to be productive of eminent advantage.

3. As the institution of private Christian fellowship is designed to embrace the whole Church—as many societies of this kind as possible should be established in each congregation; and all the members of the Church should consider themselves as under special obligation to be connected—each member with a particular society. Their own edification and comfort, as well as their usefulness in the Church require them to enter willingly into such an association.

4. As private social prayer should be regarded as essential to the welfare of the Church, it is proper, that, in the case of an organized congregation, the Fellowship Meeting should be formally established by the Eldership of the Church, and that it should be placed under the superintendence of the office-bearers in the house of God.*

II.—MEMBERS OF THE FELLOWSHIP MEETING.

1. Those who are in the full fellowship of the Church should seek to be members of the social Prayer-meeting. The children of church-members should be also required early to attend—an account should be regularly taken of their attendance, and attention should be always shown to the young at the meet-

* In the Reformed Presbyterian Church, when a new Prayer-meeting is to be established, the Minister or a Ruling Elder attends, by appointment of the Session, and formally organizes it, giving suitable directions for its future management. Throughout the congregations, one or more Fellowship Meetings are placed under the care of each elder—who visits them regularly and reports their state to the Session. The Societies are likewise visited on stated occasions by the minister, as a special part of his pastoral duty.

ings, by catechizing and special instructions adapted to their capacity.

2. The aim should constantly be to have all the members of a congregation—male and female—thus associated together; and besides, persons of serious, religious habits, who attend upon the public ministrations of the word, and manifest regard to a Scriptural profession, are to be admitted and encouraged to attend the Fellowship meeting, if they express a desire to this effect. These are not, however, to be called to take part in conducting the religious exercises; but may join in the religious conversation, and receive the edification connected with the whole social worship. For the sake of good order, it is proper that the admission of this class of persons to sit in society should be proposed by a member of the meeting, and concurred in by the rest of the brethren.*

3. As the promise of the Redeemer's gracious presence is assured to two or three meeting in his name, such a number may constitute a social prayer-meeting. In general, from eight to twelve members of the Church residing in the same locality,

* From the nature of Christian Fellowship, it seems to be required that the social prayer-meeting should be so conducted that all the members of the church should take an active part in the religious exercises. The method which is common in our day of having a single prayer-meeting in a congregation—attended often by very few members—and conducted only by the minister, or an office-bearer of the church, presents no proper example of the Fellowship Meeting. It is still worse, when the person or persons, who assume to lead in the religious exercises, are known not to be of prayerful habits or distinguished for godly practice. Need we wonder that the attendance, in such a case, is meagre and unsatisfactory; and that such associations linger out a feeble existence, till they expire? Prayer-meetings in any form can never be properly kept up, when the members are persons who do not practise secret prayer, or who neglect family-worship.

may suitably form a society. It is proper when the number of constituent members is largely increased, to separate by mutual agreement, so as to form two or more smaller societies.

III.—TIME AND WAY OF CONDUCTING THE SOCIAL EXERCISES.

1. Fellowship meetings should be held on the Lord's day, when the members have not access to public ordinances dispensed in purity; and on such occasions, a larger portion of time should be spent in the social religious exercises, than at other times of assembling.*

2. As a principal object of the social Prayer-meeting is to keep alive constantly religious impressions and to seek the blessing upon all other ordinances of religion, the members should meet together *weekly*—except when hindered by distance or unavoidable circumstances; in other cases, the meetings should be held, not less frequently than *every alternate week*.

3. Members should regard the time set apart for this ordinance as sacred. They should therefore make all proper arrangements that other engagements do not interfere with it,—should attend punctually at the appointed hour of meeting, and should discover, during the exercises, deep and heartfelt interest in the proceedings. In all ordinary cases, the length of time spent in the exercises

* "On Sabbath-days, it is proper that such Societies should convene about the ordinary time that public worship begins, and that they spend that time in these private social exercises, which they have not access to spend in public worship—this is the next most profitable way of employing sacred time."—*Short Directory for Religious Societies*.—p. 24.

should not exceed *two hours*. Hence it becomes necessary to study to be brief and comprehensive in the exercises of social worship, and in spiritual converse.

4. The exercises of the social meeting should be commenced precisely at the appointed hour. Those who come forward late, owe an explanation to their brethren, and from them, and from those who were absent from the previous meeting, such an explanation should be asked by the member presiding, and should be frankly given. Persons who are negligent in their attendance, or who are in the habit of coming forward late, should be admonished by their brethren, in the spirit of fidelity and love. If members are absent from the meetings of the society, twice or thrice in succession, without any known cause, they should be waited on by brethren appointed for that purpose, and exhorted in relation to their duty. Should individuals, after such admonitions, continue negligent or irregular in their attendance—it may be proper to report the matter to the office-bearers of the church, and to regard those who are thus amiss, as not entitled to the full privileges of the society, till they amend.

The Exercises of the Social Prayer-meeting, are Praise,—Prayer,—Reading the word,—and spiritual converse upon the truths of the Scriptures. At times, it may be profitable to give and receive select intelligence respecting the state of the Church, and the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom,—to read and converse upon portions of the Church's Testimony, and to engage in the duties of fraternal reproof and exhortation. The members of the Social meeting, should also, on particular calls in pro-

vidence, hold special assemblies for solemn Fasting and humiliation, and for united Thanksgiving.

5. As all the members meet as brethren, and in terms of equality, they should therefore be required in *regular rotation*, to conduct the devotional exercises. The services may be suitably commenced by invoking the Divine presence and the aid of the Spirit,—then engaging in united praise, reading the word, and prayer. The member who opens the society, for the sake of decent order, should act as president during the meeting,—proposing to the members separately, the subject of religious conversation, and directing the order of the different services.

6. After the discussion of the subject of religious converse, the next member in rotation on the roll should be called to conduct devotional exercises, by reading the word, praise, and prayer; and after a subject for conversation at the next meeting shall have been proposed, and any other matters attended to that the interests of the society or the Church shall seem to require, either the same member or another may conclude, by brief thanksgiving and prayer, and by singing a portion of psalmody. It may be profitable for edification, to vary the exercises at these meetings, by reading and commenting occasionally on portions of the Church's Confession and Testimony, instead of discussing a Scriptural passage.

7. The subjects of religious converse at the social Prayer-meetings, should be the truths of the Divine word, relating to doctrine and godly practice. In general, the subject should be proposed, in the form of a question, at one meeting, and discussed at the following. Each member, male or female,

has the privilege of submitting such a question. The subject of religious converse should be presented—not for gratifying curiosity, or for controversy chiefly, and least of all for the display of abilities;—but to promote Christian edification and true godliness. It should therefore be carefully considered by those who propose it, and should be attentively studied by the members who discuss it.* The members should consider it culpable either to neglect to study the subject of religious converse, or to be altogether silent, when it is discussed in the society. As the social Prayer meeting partakes of the character of a private *conversational* party, female as well as male members should regard it as their duty to contribute their part to the edification and mutual help of all the society. It appears proper, when females and youthful members are backward to speak on the subject of religious conversation, to require them to select and read appropriate portions of Scripture, explaining and applying the subject. Thus they will themselves receive spiritual benefit by searching the Scriptures; and others may be edified, in perceiving the fulness of the word, and by Scripture appearing as its own interpreter.

8. Besides conversing together in the social Prayer-meeting, on the great questions of the word

* “Subjects should be *selected* for conversation to promote godly edifying; not to indulge curiosity or strife. And subjects should be taken up in pleasing variety and rotation. The doctrines of the cross,—the privileges of the covenant of grace,—the internal spiritual exercises of the saints,—the holy duties of Christianity,—the institutions and order of the Christian Church,—the spiritual design of these institutions,—the word of the Redeemer’s patience,—the dispensations of Divine providence towards the members, in the Church and in the world, should, in instructive variety, be brought under review in the conference of Christian brethren.”—*Guide to Private Social Worship*.—35, 36.

and the duties of Christianity, it may be most profitable at times to speak to one another in relation to things of public interest to the Church,—and on subjects of personal experience, such as the graces, trials, or conflicts of believers.

IV.—MANNER OF CONDUCTING THE BUSINESS OF FELLOWSHIP MEETINGS.

1. Members should seek for themselves, and endeavour to promote in others, spirituality of mind and a true devotional spirit. They should remember that they are gathered together in the name of Christ—that they should fervently desire his gracious presence, and aim to give evidence that they have realized it. The whole exercises are to be regarded as acts of religious worship, and every thing inconsistent with such a solemn position is to be carefully avoided.

2. A Christian *loving spirit* should uniformly pervade these meetings. Hence a supercilious, overbearing, censorious frame of mind is, above all things, to be avoided. “Members should meet in the spirit of mutual subjection, honouring one another,” and preferring one another. They should watch, in the meeting, and when going to it or retiring from it, against remarks that would seem to indicate slighting or want of interest and affection towards brethren. The great aim of this association is to display in its power the charity that thinketh no evil—that covers a multitude of sins—and that disposes Christians to edify each other in love. Church members should always avoid *giving offence* to brethren. If offences come, when they are of a

private nature, they should be adjusted by mutual explanations and concessions of the parties themselves. The fellowship meeting—without claiming or exercising any judicial power—may be of use in removing offences, either by dealing with the parties, in the spirit of meekness and fidelity, when they are present at the meeting, or by employing a member or members, in a more private way, to reconcile them. Public scandals do not come properly under the cognizance of the fellowship meeting, but of the judicatories of the Church.

3. The members of the social prayer-meeting should ever manifest a deep and heartfelt interest in all the brethren. In cases of outward affliction or distress, bodily or mental, they should visit one another, and make their circumstances matter of united prayer in the meetings. They should hold themselves ready to relieve cases of temporal distress of their brethren; and it may be proper, where members are prevented, through age or protracted affliction, from attending public or social ordinances, to hold occasional meetings of the society with them in their dwellings.

4. The devotional exercises should ordinarily be short, though not formal;—the remarks made upon the topic of conversation should be brief and appropriate—those which have been already made by members should not be repeated by others. Individuals should guard against occupying the time of others, by much speaking—and the services should be throughout conducted so as not to produce weariness. The *manner*, too, of conducting the services is important. The Scriptures should be read with due solemnity—the praises of God sung with grave,

sweet melody, and observations on the subject of conversation should be made audibly and intelligibly.

5 As in the fellowship of the Church, the strong should help the weak, and all should seek to promote the edification of the whole body,—when new societies are established, it is proper that some members of adjacent societies should meet with their brethren for some time, for their help and encouragement. When societies have been divided into two smaller associations, meeting in separate places, the members should, for a time at least, occasionally correspond, by meeting together, in remembrance of their former intimate fellowship.

To promote the extended fellowship of the brethren, a method of *general correspondence* throughout a congregation has often been found beneficial. Societies exchange visits by mutual delegation, and on such occasions, they not only take sweet counsel together, in solemn devotional exercises, and spiritual converse on the word; but they affectionately inquire of the welfare and trials of each other, and tender to one another mutual exhortation and encouragement. Periodical meetings of delegates from all the societies of a congregation—held either quarterly or half-yearly—have been found an excellent means of promoting the unity of the Church—keeping alive the love of the brethren—and of stimulating Church members to the active discharge of all commanded duties. At these meetings, besides attending to the external concerns of the house of God, it is proper to propose special inquiries concerning the state of each particular fellowship-meeting; and the delegates, as united in the bond of a sacred brotherhood, should

seek to advance the prosperity of every separate society.*

6. The various societies for united prayer should consider that they have been associated together for the performance of important *public works*, for the advancement of the Redeemer's glory in the earth. This is a machinery admirably adapted for conducting every department of benevolent Christian effort. The members of a fellowship prayer-meeting should regard it as their special duty to promote *missions* to the destitute and neglected in their own neighbourhood. They should act as a Bible Society, and should feel themselves called to instruct the ignorant around out of the Word—and should consult and pray and labour to promote missions to perishing men throughout the world. Fellowship meetings vigorously conducted may become, under the Divine blessing, the germs of congregations—and they may be a happy instrumentality for the revival of religion among themselves and throughout the Church. Encouraged by our Lord's assurance, "If any two of you on earth shall agree to ask the Father in heaven, it shall be given you," they should betake themselves to such a work—they should consult together, and pray unitedly and fervently for such ends. The prayer-meetings of the Church may thus become so many "*centres of light*" in the world. Blessed themselves, they may dispense blessings to others even in distant places and throughout future generations.†

* See Appendix.

† In various congregations of the Church, it has been found an efficient means of promoting the cause of missions to raise contributions for this object at each social meeting. These contributions are furnished, either by casting voluntary offerings into boxes kept in the society—or by members enrolling their names in a book provided

7. As it is essential to Christian fraternal fellowship that brethren, meeting for united prayer and conference, should use in their intercourse the utmost Christian freedom, and should speak to one another in love and confidence, it should be regarded as obligatory upon the members individually not to *report abroad* what is transacted in the society—and they should consider themselves as solemnly bound never to say or do any thing that would mar the edification or comfort either of the whole society or of any particular member.

SPIRIT OF THE DUTY.

Besides the Special Rules for the organization and management of Prayer-meetings, which have been given in the preceding pages, we subjoin some Directions, in relation to the *spirit* in which the duty is to be observed. Redundancy of counsel on such a subject will not be regarded as superfluous by those who feel the importance and value of this institution, and who desire to promote throughout the Church its general observance and efficiency.

First of all, *Excuses* for neglecting social prayer should not be indulged, and *Evils* that prevent its proper observance should be watched against and avoided.

As in reference to other religious duties, the ex-

for the purpose, and contributing regularly according to their engagement—all recognizing the obligation to dedicate some portion of their substance for the spread of the Redeemer's kingdom in the earth. The latter method has been found the most efficient; and the youth of the Church should be employed and encouraged in such an undertaking.

cuses offered for the neglect of fellowship-meetings are manifold. However plausibly advanced, or with whatever apparent sincerity, they too often indicate that there is no heart to the duty, and that the individual who presents them has no right impression of the paramount claims of personal religion, or of the necessity of diligence and perseverance in its pursuit. To be fertile in making excuse is a sure sign of the want of personal interest in the privileges of true religion; and against such as are thus characterized is issued the sentence of final exclusion—*“None of those men that were bidden shall taste of my supper.”* There is generally much self-deception here. A due consideration of the authority by which the duty is enjoined and enforced, and of the eminent benefits which result from proper attendance upon the ordinance, would show the excuses that are advanced for neglecting it to be futile, frivolous, and sinful.

The *want of time* is alleged, for instance, as an excuse for non-attendance. The engrossing pursuits of worldly business are pleaded as requiring constant attention—attendance upon other religious duties, in public and private, interferes with the observance of the fellowship-meeting—and many occasional interruptions hinder punctuality of attendance, even where the duty is recognized, and the individual has been brought into connexion with the ordinance. A proper consideration of the value of time as a “talent” to be occupied for the honour of Him who confers it, and who has a paramount claim upon all our time, would at once show the futility of all such excuses. Christian fellowship is among the highest of our religious privileges. The social prayer meet-

ing is one of the most precious opportunities of religious improvement. We should continually recognize our obligation to *redeem* time. We should beware of indulging a worldly spirit. What we gain of earthly things in the pursuit of business, in time abstracted from any religious duty—private, domestic, or public, to which we have a proper call, can yield no real profit or enjoyment. The maxim is of universal application—“*Godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.*” Time may easily be saved from company-keeping, recreation, and undue indulgence, for religious duties. At most, the period allotted to us on earth is a brief span—given chiefly to prepare for eternity. A small portion is all that is required for the exemplary performance of this duty; and to regard this as sacred and not to encroach upon it, will not only prove beneficial to ourselves, but be of singular benefit to others. It is certain that many servants of God who have been distinguished for punctual attendance upon the social prayer-meeting, have been, at the same time, energetic and successful in outward pursuits,—and their experience has uniformly borne testimony that attention to Christian Fellowship has, in no instance, been prejudicial to their worldly interests.* Even when

*The writer recollects with pleasure the statement made by an esteemed elder of the Church, who has been active and prosperous in worldly business, and has been long known as a most valuable member of the social prayer-meeting, that, for a period of between *Thirty and Forty* years, he was only absent some three or four times from the assemblies of the brethren for prayer and fraternal converse,—and these few cases of absence were caused either by personal indisposition, or by domestic affliction and bereavement. In such instances, it has been found that time spent in the prayer-meeting, instead of retarding the active pursuits of worldly business, has tended to recruit both the mind and body, while it served to realize the victory of faith in overcoming the world.

members of the Church are subject to the will of others, Christian wisdom and manly firmness will often obtain for them the valued opportunity for social religious intercourse. When the glory of God, and preparation for heaven are regarded as the highest objects, persons in almost any condition of life will find little difficulty in obtaining connexion with the fellowship meeting and in maintaining punctuality of attendance.

The excuse is sometimes presented of *deficiency of gifts* for social prayer. Individuals on this ground refuse to enter into the fellowship of the Church where attendance on the prayer-meeting is required, or afterwards forsake the assembling of themselves together. Such a course betrays the absence of a proper sense of the value of Christian privileges, and the want of earnest prayer in secret, by seeking spiritual gifts from God. Gifts are improved by exercise. It is in the way of attending to duty, not of neglecting it, that we obtain strength for its performance. Experience amply shows that persons who have engaged in social duties, under a deep sense of their own unfitness, have often become eminent for Christian improvement and usefulness. Not unfrequently is this excuse the offspring of spiritual pride and sinful shame, and while indulged in, it is a barrier to all improvement. The greater the lack of gifts, the more need has the individual to take all methods of supplying the deficiency. The humblest Christian may impart benefit to others. Even *one talent* is not to be buried in the earth, but to be expended for the glory of the Giver.

It may perhaps be, moreover, alleged that ready *access to public ordinances, and frequent attend-*

ance upon public meetings for religious and benevolent objects render the observance of fellowship-meetings less necessary, or leave little time for this purpose. These, however, furnish no valid grounds for the neglect of a highly important ordinance. No one duty supersedes another. On the contrary, as private prayer forms the best preparation for the performance of domestic duties, so social prayer will be found both the most suitable preparation for waiting upon public ordinances, and an excellent means of improving the privileges of the Sanctuary. Our Lord who went about accompanied by his chosen followers, continually *doing good*, and preaching the gospel of the Kingdom, frequently took his disciples apart for united fellowship. All religious duties are useful and needed in their place; and the Christian, who is growing in grace, and in the knowledge of Christ, will not readily forsake private fellowship, because he is privileged to go frequently with the multitude to the house of God. While Christian association for benevolent exertion constitutes one of the most pleasing characteristics of our age, and members of the Church should promote it in all proper ways, this cannot form any valid excuse for neglecting private Christian fellowship. On the other hand, as we have already shown, these meetings furnish the best machinery for benevolent effort; and attendance upon them in a right spirit will assuredly animate to devote the heart and life to labours for the relief of the distressed, and for the world's conversion.

Offences received from brethren should never be pleaded as an excuse for absence from the fellowship-meeting. In their present state of imperfec-

tion, Christians may expect offences to come—and they should be regarded as a needful trial of faith and other graces. Special care should be taken neither to give nor readily to take offence. In all cases, alienation from brethren should be watched against and avoided. Even where real offence has been given, our primary duty is to “overcome evil with good.” The fellowship-meeting is too precious a means of spiritual benefit to be forsaken from humour or caprice, or on account of provocations received from brethren. Those who are thus tempted to withdraw should consider the weakness of grace, and the power of corruption in their own hearts; and they should ever remember and practise the Divine directions—“Confess your faults one to another” — “Bear one another’s burdens” — “Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.”

Should it be alleged, finally, that the members of the prayer-meeting *are of low attainments*, and that *little profit is to be derived from associating with them*. The individual who makes this excuse should consider whether the fault is not in himself. In the body of Christ, the least member has its assigned place and function—and is needed for the welfare and completeness of the whole. Growing believers learn to esteem brethren highly in love, and to prefer others to themselves. Those who are truly spiritual cherish a low estimate of their own attainments, and are ever ready to confess their obligations to brethren. If a prayer-meeting is in a weak and decayed state, there is the greater need of those who feel and lament this, to labour for its revival. Instead of absenting themselves, they should,

by punctual attendance, by manifesting a prayerful, loving spirit, and by Christian patience and activity, provoke others to love and good works. In the view of the obligation of this precious ordinance, and of the important purposes which it is fitted to subserve, all these excuses must appear futile and unworthy. Christians will give the best evidence of the reality and growth of grace in their hearts, and of their desire to promote the prosperity of the Church by rejecting them entirely. Constrained by the love of Christ, they should live not to themselves. Animated by the bright prospects of the perfect fellowship of the saints in glory, they should be “steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as they know that their labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.”

As *evils* to be avoided, may be noticed the *desire of displaying gifts—the spirit of idle speculation—fondness for theological controversy—and arrogant, overbearing, or resentful conduct*. While in certain states of religious society, these evils either in whole or in part may exist, they should be carefully watched against and avoided, as detrimental to the developement of Christian principle, and marring fraternal intercourse. Members of prayer-meetings assemble together, not for ostentation, but to receive spiritual benefit and to instruct and edify one another. Without charity, the most distinguished gifts are nothing. Mere speculative acquaintance with Divine truth, and the power to vanquish an opponent in controversy may be possessed, where the heart is unrenewed, and the word exerts no sanctifying influence upon the heart or life. The great concerns of the Redeemer’s glory, and of personal salvation,

form the all-engrossing subjects of Christian intercourse, and furnish abundant matter of social prayer and united praise. Constant watchfulness is required, that nothing low or worldly—nothing that would unsettle or distract the mind, or unfit it for solemn acts of religious worship—nothing of doubtful disputation be introduced into meetings for joint supplication and mutual edification. Arrogant and resentful conduct is, in every instance, incompatible with Christian obligation and profession. It is peculiarly unsuited to the private fellowship of members of the Church—of those who have declared themselves to be partakers of the same hope of the common salvation. Wherever such a disposition manifests itself, profitable intercourse must cease, and the great ends of Christian fellowship be defeated. The members of prayer-meetings should watch and govern their own spirits, and should study to mortify all evil in their tempers. Demeaning themselves in the spirit of humility and mutual subjection, they should respect the judgment of brethren—deal tenderly even with their prejudices—forbear each other in love, and bear one another's burdens, thus fulfilling the law of Christ. No part of the time of a fellowship meeting should ever be occupied in strife or recrimination. The beginning of such evils is like "the letting in of water." While Christians individually watch and pray lest they enter into temptation, they are bound to excite and encourage each other to oppose every thing in themselves or others, that would obstruct loving and profitable intercourse.

Secondly, The *spirit* to be cherished by those who attend the fellowship meeting deserves consideration. It should be,

1. *Devotional and loving.* A spirit of devotion habitually cherished is characteristic of the existence and growth of true religion. It springs from faith in Christ, and implies supreme love to Him, and constant dependance upon Him in all things. Christians, if they would advance in the Divine life, must labour to have deep and experimental views of the truths of the word—they must realize the gracious presence of God—and draw all spiritual support and comfort from the person, work, and character of the Saviour. Living in the Spirit, they must also “*walk in the Spirit*”—habitually exercising and increasing in grace. By such a spirit, they are drawn to associate together for the performance of spiritual services, and fellowship meetings are rendered attractive and profitable. In these assemblies, true devotion finds the desired and appropriate scope for its exercise. Here the flame of piety in the heart is fanned, and fellow-travellers to Zion experience, as the disciples going to Emmaus, “that their hearts burn together”—while they offer up united prayers and praises at the Mercy-seat, and while they converse from the Scriptures. A devotional spirit is the very life of the fellowship meeting—and every thing opposed to it in words or mental habits, is wholly unsuited to the ordinance of Christian communion.*

* The want of a devotional frame may be said to be a principal reason, why members of the Church refrain from attending the Social Prayer-meeting,—and why in cases where such associations have been established, they have been found in a languishing condition. The pithy remark of the martyr Renwick is deserving of attention. Speaking of the duty of Christians assembling together in times of trial, and of their cultivating intimate fellowship, he says—“*When the coals are few, they must be drawn the more closely together to cause warmth.*”

Sympathizing in common trials is characteristic of true disciples; and to the private prayer-meeting, these exercises are eminently appropriate and congenial. A loving spirit is at once the ornament and perfection of Christian character. While all coldness and alienation of heart are utterly incompatible with the social prayer-meeting, this ordinance has ever been found a hallowed means of drawing forth and nourishing the spirit of disinterested benevolence and fraternal affection. Those who attend the fellowship meeting, should watch and pray against declension in love, as a main hindrance to all comfortable intercourse, and should habitually aim to have as theirs the distinctive character of primitive believers—"BEHOLD! HOW THESE CHRISTIANS LOVE ONE ANOTHER."

2. *Humility and self-denial* should distinguish the members of the fellowship meeting. Every thing connected with this ordinance is fitted to inspire these dispositions. In it, we are called to draw near God; we sit down at Christ's feet to receive the lessons of his word, and to copy his blessed example. We profess ourselves to be sinners saved by grace, and we mingle with fellow-saints, who are running the Christian course, and pressing forward to lay hold on the crown of glory. The truths which we contemplate—the exercises in which we engage—the hopes that we entertain—and the discoveries made of our own spirit and frame of heart while occupied in religious duties—all are calculated to teach us the deepest humility. Associating with fellow-Christians, we will often be brought to see and feel the imperfection of our attainments, and the sinfulness of our best services. We should be al-

ways ready to deny ourselves for the good of the brethren. Persons of the highest gifts and attainments have no ground of boasting, or of affecting superiority. The highest may learn much that is profitable from the lowest in gifts and station. The prayer-meeting when rightly conducted is wonderfully fitted to develope these distinguishing traits of the renewed character ; and the display of these is eminently calculated to render the ordinance refreshing and profitable. As the elect of God, believers learn, when associating together, to put on humbleness of mind,—bowels of mercy, meekness, long-suffering. They see the excellence of the precept, and tender to it ready obedience—“ *Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory, but in lowliness of mind, let each esteem others better than themselves.*” “This lowly spirit will regulate temper, and prevent offence from being given, and from being taken; it will prepare the mind for receiving instruction from others; it will give facility to intercourse, excite affection among the members, and invite the gracious presence of Him who is meek and lowly,—who resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the lowly.”*

3. The spirit of *Christian activity* and *punctuality* should distinguish those who frequent the fellowship-meeting. Christians are enjoined “so to run, that they may obtain.” The representation of one that was singularly distinguished in the Divine life is, “Forgetting those things that are behind, and reaching forward to those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”† This habit

* Guide to Private Social Worship.—p. 47.

† 1 Cor. ix. 24. Phil. iii. 13, 14.

of holy diligence and activity is peculiarly needed to promote fraternal intercourse among Christians. A slothful spirit indisposes to the performance of social duties. When it is entertained, individuals become fitful and irregular in their attendance, and neglect to make due preparation for the solemn religious exercises before engaging in them. Indolence in the pursuit of Divine things is most injurious both to those who indulge it and to others. A spirit of this kind is infectious, and fertile in making excuse. Any trifling obstruction will detain an indolent, inactive person from the fellowship-meeting; and such a disposition acquires strength, till those who indulge it, either leave off altogether to do good, or become withered and sapless, even while they observe the outward forms of religion. Our duty is to “gird up the loins” of the mind, in this as in all other religious services. We are commanded to give all “diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end.”* The Christian course is compared to a RACE, and unless it is run with strenuous effort, and persevered in to the end, the prize may not be expected. The Saviour’s own example inculcates regular and punctual attendance upon religious ordinances. The *regularity* of his waiting on public ordinances is indicated when it is said, “*As his custom was*, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day;” and we have a striking example of his *punctuality*, when it is said, “And *when the hour was come*, He sat down and the twelve disciples with him.” Punctuality in attending the prayer-meeting should be shown in redeeming from other

* Hebrews, vi. 11.

engagements the period set apart for social intercourse—in being present at the hour of assembling—and in waiting patiently till the conclusion of the exercises. Acting in this spirit, we show that we honour the institutions of religion; and the example thus exhibited is fitted to impress upon brethren the value of social religious intercourse, and to promote their spiritual improvement.

Lastly—An earnest desire to *receive and impart spiritual benefit* through this ordinance should characterize those who attend upon it. Mere waiting on the fellowship meeting, under a conviction that it is a duty required by the Church, may arise from formality, and will be reckoned only a bodily service. The private prayer-meeting, we have seen, is an eminent means of communicating mutual spiritual benefit; and we should have recourse to it, with this as a distinct and paramount object. For the right performance of all religious duties, there is required “preparation of heart”—affections in unison, and desires strongly set upon the objects that are sought after and expected. Prayer itself has been appropriately said to be “the offering up of the desires of the heart to God.” The connexion graciously established between prayer and the reception of the blessing is this—“*He satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness.*” *What things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.*”* In attending on the fellowship-meeting, there are many and very precious objects to be realized. The Redeemer’s glory to be advanced, and his presence en-

* Psalm, cvii. 9. Mark, xi. 24.

joyed—the interests of his Church to be promoted—spiritual and experimental knowledge to be obtained—communion with God and the saints to be realized,—vital godliness increased, and the blessings of true religion to be transmitted to future generations—these are among the important benefits which are wont to be conferred upon the praying assemblies of the faithful, or communicated through their instrumentality. When going to attend these associations, and while engaged in the exercises peculiar to them, we should seek to have spiritual desires in lively exercise. Preparation should be made by meditation, reading the word and prayer, and especially by duly considering the objects and ends of the meeting for fellowship and united prayer. The desire of the Saviour's promised presence should be predominant in the heart; and the Holy Spirit should be sought, not only to infuse within us a suitable frame of heart, but also to be as the plenteous and refreshing rain upon the assembly of praying ones. We should go to meet with brethren in order to get good to our own souls, and to communicate good to others. In the spirit of Moses, when he invited Hobab his brother in law, to accompany Israel through the wilderness, we should invite and encourage inquirers—“*Come thou with us and we will do thee good; for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.*” “*And it shall be, if thou go with us, yea, it shall be, that what goodness the Lord shall do unto us, the same will we do unto thee.*”* These meetings are designed to be a means of quickening, instruction, Christian

* Numbers, x. 29, 32.

progress, and spiritual comfort. Every instance of our attending should minister to our spiritual profiting, and to the promotion of the Redeemer's work in the earth. Every separate visit to the prayer-meeting should be regarded as a precious opportunity, which may not again occur, and which should afterwards be remembered as a season of blessing. Christians called to be "the lights of the world," should let their light shine before others, that they may glorify their Father in heaven. They should "provoke one another to love and good works." Desiring themselves to live for the great end of glorifying God, they should study to do all the good they can by their presence at every prayer-meeting—while they expect for themselves spiritual blessing from God's own institution, and loving intercourse with his people. The Divine promises are all encouraging—"The Lord will create upon every dwelling place of Mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for upon all the glory shall be a defence." "I will make them and the places round about my hill a blessing, and I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing."*

* Isaiah, iv. 5. Ezekiel, xxxiv. 26.

CHAPTER VII.

CONCLUDING CONSIDERATIONS AND ENCOURAGEMENTS FOR THE OBSERVANCE OF FELLOWSHIP MEETINGS.

HAVING exhibited the *nature, obligations, and advantages* of private social prayer, and given *rules and directions* for fellowship meetings, the question naturally arises—What shall be the result of these instructions? Will it be only to admit the principles which have been discussed, and continue to neglect their application? Or will it be to seek to reduce them immediately to practice, and thus to aim at a thorough revival throughout the Church?

There are CONSIDERATIONS of the most solemn and weighty kind which should lead us to adopt the latter alternative—there are peculiar ENCOURAGEMENTS at the present time, which should excite and animate the friends of Christ to meet often together for prayer and spiritual converse, and to labour diligently for the extension and efficiency of such associations. These Considerations and Encouragements have been partly referred to already; notwithstanding, it may tend to deepen the sense of the obligation of the duty, to present them distinctly in the conclusion.

First of all, The AUTHORITY OF CHRIST—the King and Head of the Church, should be of paramount weight, in urging to the observance of the fellowship meeting.

The Redeemer certainly instituted this ordinance, and enjoined its observance upon his disciples in all succeeding ages. He has connected the promise of his gracious presence with attendance upon it. He has placed the mark of his gracious approval upon those who associate together for spiritual intercourse, and who thus speak often one to another; and special benefits in grace and providence, He has ever shown himself willing to confer upon the assemblies of his people, in answer to their united prayers. The law of nature itself dictates such reunions. But with the Christian, the will of Christ revealed in his word, enjoining mutual duties upon all the members of the household of faith, which can only be adequately performed by associating for familiar spiritual intercourse and social prayer, possesses intrinsic authority and obligation of the highest kind. How can we be genuine disciples of the Redeemer, if we do not submit to his authority in all things? How can we love and obey Him, as our Master, if we do not honour Him by a diligent attendance upon all prescribed institutions? By special gracious commands, He has enjoined the ordinance of fellowship; and by many bright and encouraging tokens, He has shown the most tender interest in those who delight in it. The duties connected with this institution honour the Saviour, and singularly tend to recommend and advance true religion. To neglect them is to violate the plain and reiterated commands of Christ, to contemn his favour, and to disregard the claims of pure and undefiled religion. On the other hand, the due observance of this important ordinance discovers a lively concern for the Saviour's honour, and constitutes a

test and evidence of loving obedience to his authority. On due consideration, Christians must surely feel that it is highly criminal to neglect such an institution. Observing it, in the spirit of cordial love and obedience, they cannot but experience that in keeping the Saviour's commandments, "there is a great reward"—they reap the fulfilment of his gracious assurance—"Where I am, there shall my servant be."

Secondly, Our own INTEREST, HAPPINESS, and USEFULNESS are intimately connected with attendance upon the ordinance of Christian fellowship. The Lord consults their best interests by calling his people to his service. Godliness is certainly profitable for all things. Wisdom's "ways are pleasantness and all her paths are peace." Much spiritual profit is derived from meeting with brethren—fellow-travellers to Mount Zion—the joint partakers of a common hope of salvation. The reading of the Sacred Oracles together, and familiar expositions of Holy Scripture—the communication of believing experiences—friendly counsels—sympathies expressed in trials—exhortation, reproof, and direction given, and the exercises of devotion engaged in by assembled disciples—all these are calculated to minister important benefits, and to sustain in trial. The followers of Christ are exposed to the benumbing influence of worldly things, and of association with worldly men. To maintain the spirit and vigour of piety, we must love retirement, and improve it by spiritual exercises. The social principle—a part of our constitution—is refined and elevated in fraternal intercourse; it is directed to its noblest ends, when it is displayed in connexion with acts of

religious worship. This is, at the same time, a source of profit and of the purest enjoyment. The pleasures of religion are enhanced by being shared with fellow-saints. The joys of sacred friendship are pure and elevated, and the sympathies which circulate among the members of Christ's mystical body are tender and most enlivening. If we would personally reap abundant spiritual profit, and experience the hallowed pleasures of religion, we should have frequent recourse to the fellowship meeting.

As a preparation for eminent usefulness, the ordinance of social prayer is invaluable. It forms an excellent training school for workmen for the Redeemer's service. Spiritual sensibilities are here awakened. The wants and miseries of perishing men are more clearly seen. Motives the most powerful and pressing are presented for Christian exertion—while united prayer in behalf of the Church and the world propels to self-dedication and devotedness. Thus, whether for our spiritual profit or comfort or usefulness, the social prayer-meeting will be found most invaluable; and for the attainment of these objects it should be regarded by us of special interest and importance.

Thirdly, **SPECIAL PRIVILEGES** enjoyed, and **BRIGHT EXAMPLES** set before us, should urge to the diligent observance of social prayer. The possession of the Word of God—access to public ordinances—the blessed hopes of the Gospel—lay those who enjoy them under manifold obligations of gratitude to associate together for prayer and praise, and other religious exercises. All our religious privileges are designed to have the effect of drawing us more closely to fellow-Christians, and of leading

us to take delight in the communion of saints. The annals of the Church have always shown that in seasons of eminent privilege and blessing, the faithful have had recourse to private social prayer, as a suitable means of expressing their devout gratitude and joy—of manifesting love to the brethren—of calling down a more abundant blessing upon the Church, and of advancing the Redeemer's glory in the earth. Prayer-meetings, we have already said, have been remarkably owned as an instrument of revival in the Church, and have been also the precious fruit of visitations of the Spirit. A great "*cloud of witnesses*" surrounds us, in attesting the value and excellence of this institution. In times of persecution and trial, the faithful have been strengthened and refreshed by spiritual intercourse with fellow-sufferers—by converse on the word of God, and by united praise and prayer. Here has the great Shepherd made his flocks to feed, and to rest at noon—ministering to them provision and protection from the rage of the oppressor. These associations were, in early times, and have been in many lands the nurseries of the Church, as well as the retreats to which fervent piety has retired in periods of declension and apostasy. The union of a few godly persons for mutual counsel and united prayer has, not unfrequently, become the germ of flourishing churches—as such associations seem yet destined to contribute, in an eminent degree, to the revival of true religion in Christian lands, and to the world's conversion. In view of the extensive irreligion and ungodliness of the masses in neighbourhoods where the light of the Gospel shines, and the acknowledged lack of faithful labourers for the spiritual harvest, whether at

home or abroad, might not Christians have recourse to united prayer with the happiest effects? Thus would their own hearts be duly impressed with the great concerns of the Saviour's glory, and with the magnitude of the work to which the Church is called, for the salvation of perishing sinners. Thus would a fit instrumentality be prepared, and impelled to go forth and labour in the Redeemer's vineyard—and in answer to united and persevering prayer, an abundant blessing would descend upon the work of the labourers. Ample testimony has been borne by the Church that in past eras of trial and enlargement, the fellowship-meeting has subserved the most valuable purposes. Why should we doubt that its influence for good shall be felt, yet more powerful and extensive in approaching periods of conflict and blessing? The recorded experience of many distinguished believers, both in life and death, has attested the benefit and refreshment that have been derived from association with brethren in the prayer-meeting. The communion of saints thus realized has proved one of the most powerful supports in the wilderness, as well as one of the most pleasing sources of grateful remembrance and praise, when its wanderings and trials have approached to their termination. Saints not a few, from dying beds and scaffolds, have spoken with evident interest and joy of intercourse with believing brethren in "*sweet societies*."

This ordinance, too, has furnished to the eye of faith and hope, one of the liveliest prospects of the glory to be revealed. The fellowship of saints will be renewed in heaven, and will there be realized in a more elevated and endearing manner than could possibly be known on earth. Amidst mutual recognitions in

the Father's house, and in the full view of the Saviour's glory, the saints made perfect will rejoice together in the fruition of their loftiest aspirations. Conflicts will then, it is true, be crowned with victory; mutual sympathy and support in sorrow and suffering are no longer required. Prayers are merged into joyful and uninterrupted praises; and ordinances suited to the wilderness state are not needed in glory. In the splendour of the Redeemer's presence and glory, there is "no temple," and "no night"—and the saints need not "the sun," nor "candle," nor any subsidiary light. They have come to Zion with "everlasting joy upon their heads," and "sorrow and sighing" have fled for ever away. But though retired, social prayer will find no place in heaven, that which was the essence of the fellowship-meeting on earth—complacential love of the brethren, and the intercourse of hearts knit together in affection, will exist and enhance the joys of the Upper Sanctuary. "*The redeemed walk there.*" All the Scriptural representations of the celestial state exhibit the saints in glory as gathered together—united in holy and indissoluble fellowship—their pleasures unalloyed and enduring, and enhanced by the vivid remembrance of the conflicts which they shared in common on their way to the heavenly inheritance. Are not such considerations fitted to deepen in thoughtful minds the sense of the value of Christian fellowship? Should they not lead the servants of God everywhere, more and more to desire access to an ordinance so precious?*

* There are some sections of the Redeemer's Church that are under peculiar obligations to remember with devout gratitude the institution of the prayer-meeting, and to maintain it efficiently. In

Fourthly, **THE CHARACTER OF THE TIMES** that are passing over the Church, and of those that are approaching, supplies powerful and constraining motives to the friends of truth to abound in the duties of Christian fellowship. The aspects of Providence are at present solemn and striking—betokening trial and blessing to the Church, and ominous of judgments to the nations. Vengeance is impending over wicked systems and their supporters. The fierce conflict of nations approaches. The downfall of mystical Babylon is at hand. The symbolical heavens and earth are shaken to their *translation*.* In

the early periods of their history, they existed and grew chiefly in Societies for united prayer and edification. In the want of public ordinances, this was their chief means of spiritual fellowship. When they afterwards obtained a stated ministry—owing to the paucity of labourers, and the limited supply of public ministrations, societies for united prayer were still the nurseries of the Church. Thus were the young instructed—the members advanced in mutual confidence, in religious knowledge, and in spiritual gifts and graces; and by the accession of others, the Church was increased and extended. The public ministrations of the word that were occasionally enjoyed were thus improved to the utmost; and brethren meeting for mutual consultation and encouragement, and engaging in the solemn exercises of devotion, were animated to self-denying exertions for advancing the cause of Christ. Thus did the religious awakening in Wales in the early part of the last century extend, and the Welsh Calvinistic body spread through the Principality, and increased in numbers and in the fruits of genuine piety. By means of the “Societies” for united prayer, the labours of Whitefield and Wesley in these countries and America, were followed by the reclaiming of multitudes, and the organization of numerous churches. The Reformed Presbyterian Church in Scotland, Ireland, and America is eminently indebted to the ordinance of Fellowship meetings for her increase, purity of doctrine and worship, and the piety and steadfastness of her members. The descendants of the fathers and founders of these sections of the Church should cleave with peculiar veneration and affection to an institution which has been to them so signal a means of blessing; and should seek, by maintaining it in vigour and efficiency, to enjoy through this ordinance enlarged increase and blessing.

* Haggai ii. 7. Hebrews xii. 27—*την μεταθεσιν*—The original word properly signifies *translation*—not removal, and refers to the change that shall take place in worldly kingdoms, when they shall become “*the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ*.”

times of confusion and distress of nations, it is specially required that the fearers of the Lord should speak often one to another. The "chambers" into which they are invited to enter till "the indignation be overpast," are not for solitary retreat and refuge, but for united counsel and prayer, and for waiting for the expected issue. In the way of God's judgments, the saints wait for him, and the desire of their soul is toward Him and the remembrance of his name.* The fervent and united prayers of the faithful have an immediate connexion with the effusion of Divine judgments upon guilty nations. The "two Anointed Ones" have power as often as they will to "shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy," and to "smite the earth with all plagues."† The Church under long oppression unites with the souls under the altar in invoking vengeance on them that dwell on the Antichristian earth. When the final destruction of mystical Babylon comes, it is represented as the answer to the many importunate prayers of the faithful in different ages and countries. The united prayers of God's people are required to give direction to the course of Divine judgments—to limit their range and operation—and that they may accomplish God's gracious purposes to the Church and the world. In perilous times, the ordinance of Christian fellowship will prove a means of safety—a shelter and defence from danger. Those who keep the word of the Saviour's "patience," are kept from "the hour of temptation" that comes "upon all the world to try them that dwell upon the earth." In answer to believing prayer,

* Isaiah xxvi. 8, 20.

† Revelation xi. 6.

the Church will be preserved amidst outward storms and commotions; and judgments will be sanctified for awakening sinners, and blessed for removing obstacles to the establishment of Christ's kingdom in the earth.

The Church, at the present eventful period, greatly needs *revival*; and this is to be earnestly sought in united and persevering prayer. Christians have a loud and distinct call to associate together for this purpose. Ministers and people equally require awakening. Even with an orthodox profession, and an increase of evangelical preaching and effort, there is observable a lamentable want of *spirituality*, and the duties of practical godliness are neglected. There are manifold dangers to the Church from the world—there are evils *within* which hinder progress, and give enemies an advantage. There is danger that the excitement and activity of the present day in religious matters may take a wrong direction and be productive of evil. The enemy comes in like a flood. The powers of darkness may be expected to be aroused to redoubled efforts as the light is spreading, and their empire is in danger. Before the Church is a great work. The sunken masses throughout Christian lands are to be reclaimed; the reproach of mere nominal Christianity to be removed from the Church; and the followers of Christ are to be raised to their proper position in the manifestation of a holy character. The Spirit, the grand promise of the last times, is absolutely needed to effect these mighty changes. Through His agency alone, the word goes forth with power: the Church is enlightened, purified, and blessed; and Christians shine forth, awakened from the sleep of death, in “the

beauties of holiness," like dew from the womb of the morning. The last powerful effusion of the Spirit, by which "the dry bones" will be quickened, and "the wilderness become a fruitful field," is promised as the fruit of importunate and persevering prayer. In view of the Church's present low condition, and of her urgent wants, should not Christians everywhere associate together for prayer and combined effort? For Zion's sake the faithful should not keep silence day nor night, and should give the Lord no rest till her "righteousness go forth as brightness, and her salvation as a lamp that burneth."

The want of a devoted *Instrumentality* for the Church's work and the world's conversion, should give intensity to the call to united prayer and spiritual converse. If the blessed era predicted and promised is to come, and the mighty changes spoken of are to be effected, multitudes of prepared instruments are required. The means of religious instruction must be greatly increased—Bibles and Missionaries sent forth in numbers vastly surpassing all that the Church has yet attempted. The offerings of Christian liberality require to be increased a thousand fold. The fallow ground must be every where broken up, and the good seed of the kingdom must be sown to an extent, in some measure commensurate to the expected harvest. Nothing can inspire faith to enter aright upon these important labours, but the spirit of prayer—nothing else will bring down the rains of heaven upon the seed sown. The world's conversion is the great object of the Church's aspirations and joyful hopes,—the high design of her mission in the earth,—the fulfilment of her destiny,

—the crown and consummation of her labours. The great article of the Church's testimony,—that for which fathers prayed and laboured, and martyrs died,—the Headship of Messiah the Prince, is yet to be fully acknowledged throughout the nations. Towards its ultimate manifestation and glorious triumph, every impediment that now exists must be removed—all must come into professed and willing subjection to the sceptre of Immanuel. To accomplish this exalted object, supernatural influences, and Divine manifestations, both of judgment and mercy are indispensably required, and these are to be sought in fervent and united prayer.

What *Motives*, high and ennobling, have Christians in our day to take counsel together respecting the great concerns of the Church's promised revival and the world's conversion! What glorious objects are before them—and their near attainment neither doubtful nor uncertain! Encouraged by assured predictions, and animated by bright hopes, they should joyfully reiterate to fellow-Christians the invitation—"Come, and let us return unto the Lord; for He hath torn and he will heal us; He hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will He revive us; in the third day He will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight." "And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, and He will teach us his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the Law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."*

The blessing large and abundant awaits the cry of

* Hosea vi. 1, 2; Isaiah ii. 3.

united and importunate prayer to precede its bestowal. When the Church is aroused to ask in faith and to give the Lord "no rest," He will arise and plead his own cause. The Spirit will be poured upon us from on high; a fit instrumentality will be raised up; the labours of faithful servants will be crowned with success; Zion will put on her beautiful garments, and be acknowledged as "the joy of the earth;" the heathen will be given to the Son for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession.

Finally—The bright *Example* of our blessed Lord, and the gracious *aid* which He guarantees, with the consideration that *our time of privileges is short*, should excite and encourage us in these duties.

If we have the mind of Christ, we must abound in prayer. Would we enjoy His presence and be with Him, we must copy His example. His was throughout a life of prayer. This was its element, support, and solace. Not only did the Saviour delight in prayer when alone—He likewise frequently engaged in it in company with his disciples. After special prayer, and enjoining on them united prayer, He commissioned his apostles—while he prayed, he was transfigured—He closed his last instructions to his disciples before he suffered, with solemn prayer. He took with him a select few and prayed in his agony in the garden. He expired on the cross praying. His ascent to heaven was begun, as with uplifted hands, He sought and commanded the blessing upon his disciples—and He went away to glory—where He "ever liveth to make intercession." Let us follow this all-perfect example. The grace of the Saviour may be certainly expected, in the

path of dutiful obedience. His righteousness is sufficient for acceptance. The Holy Spirit promised to them that ask him, will enable to obey Divine precepts, and be the unfailing Source of holiness and comfort. Our day of privilege and opportunity is hastening to a close. We are commanded not to forsake *the assembling of ourselves*, and so much *the more*, “AS WE SEE THE DAY APPROACHING.” The things of time are transitory and fleeting. Death is near. The judgment-seat and eternity are at hand. Soon will our connexion with the fellowship of saints on earth terminate—soon will our opportunities of prayer end for ever. Oh! how precious do the seasons of hallowed intercourse with believers appear, as they approach to a close. The record concerning the royal Psalmist, when his public work was done, is—“*The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended.*” Like him, our work and life should end with prayer. The transition will be joyful beyond expression—to pass from the fellowship of saints on earth to the company and employments of the ransomed in glory. There all that was desired and hoped for will be fully realized. There praise will be ennobling and perpetual; and the Lamb, standing in the midst of “the four and twenty elders,” will be the Centre of all hearts—the Object of enraptured wonder and adoration for evermore.

APPENDIX.

I.—SUBJECTS OF RELIGIOUS CONVERSATION IN FELLOWSHIP MEETINGS.

THE subjects of spiritual converse in the social prayer-meeting should be such as tend to mutual edification, and practical godliness. As a specimen of the questions that may be suitably proposed from passages of Scripture, we subjoin a few, chiefly from those which are given in the "*Short Directory for Religious Societies*"—and from a useful little work published in 1757, entitled—"*An Attempt towards the Improvement of Religious Fellowship*," by a "Well-wisher to Religion."

Psalm ii. 12,—"*Kiss the Son, lest He be angry.*"

Q. How are we to kiss the Son of God, so as to escape his anger?

Psalm iv. 7,—"*Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine abound.*"

Q. What are the singular excellencies of that joy and gladness which arise from the light of God's countenance, above all earthly joys?

Psalm xxvii. 4,—"*To behold the beauty of the Lord,*" &c.

Q. What is the beauty of the Lord, which his saints behold and admire in his house?

Psalm lxxxiv. 4,—"*Blessed are they that dwell in thy house.*"

Q. 1. What special blessings are conferred in holy ordinances?

2. How may we know if we are blessed therein?

Psalm cxix. 19,—"*I am a stranger in the earth; hide not thy commandments from me.*"

Q. How do the children of God live as strangers on earth; and what argument does this furnish for Divine teaching?

Isaiah lvi. 6,—"*And taketh hold of my covenant.*"

Q. What is God's covenant of which we are to take hold—and how do we take hold of it?

Luke i. 53—“*He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He hath sent empty away.*”

Q. 1. Who are the hungry whom the Lord fills, and the rich whom He sends away empty?

2. What is the goodness with which he satisfies the hungry?

John i. 14,—“*And we beheld his glory.*”

Q. What is the glory which faith discovers in the Lord Jesus?

The religious Questions proposed in the Fellowship Meeting should be stated in simple and perspicuous terms, and should be such as naturally to furnish important instruction, and subject-matter for united prayer. From the specimen given, the attentive reader of the Scriptures will be at no loss to propose such questions as the circumstances of the Society, or the condition of the members may seem to require.

In the “*Attempt towards the Improvement of Fellowship Meetings,*” the answers are given; and are generally expressed in a manner befitting the capacity of the members of the private social meeting, and so as to promote spirituality and godly practice. Though some of the answers are rather lengthened for an extract, we subjoin a few, chiefly because of the plain but valuable instructions which they contain.—The expressions are, in some instances, rather quaint and familiar, but we give them with slight alteration, as adapted to the tone of thought and feeling of those who delight in spiritual converse.

QUESTION I.

Malachi iii. 16,—“*Then they that feared the Lord, spake often one to another.*”

What are the duties incumbent upon fellow-members of the same religious society?

Those who have recently become members should examine carefully, as in God’s sight, whether they were moved to seek such fellowship from ostentation, or the desire of worldly gain, or an empty profession of religion—or from love to God, gratitude to him, and the desire to do his will—that their own souls might be benefited, and that they might be useful to others.

2. It is their duty to study in all things to be exemplary in the world, as the eyes of others that know they are members will be fixed upon them—and as experience teaches us that example frequently goes farther than precept. For this purpose, they should be diligent in the use of all scriptural means for mortifying indwelling sin, and for strengthening habits of grace.

3. They should conscientiously and punctually attend the meetings with brethren—and not forsake the assembling of themselves together, as the manner of some is.

4. It is their duty to study to improve the time spent in society to the glory of God; and to communicate their gifts and graces to one another, for the mutual benefit of all the members.

5. They should maintain the communion of saints in the bond of love, without hatred or malice; and the bond of peace without variance or divisions—they should therefore avoid such questions or subjects of conversation as are unprofitable and have a tendency to raise or carry on strife or debate.

6. It is their duty to rejoice in each other's gifts and graces, and to be thankful to God for them. They should aim to support the weak—comfort the feeble-minded—be patient toward one another—and to bear with each other's infirmities, covering them in love.

7. If any member be overtaken with a fault, it is their duty to restore such in the spirit of meekness, considering themselves lest they be tempted.

8. It is their duty when there is need for reproof, to administer it in meekness and love. When they themselves are reproved by any of the brethren, they should take it in good part, accounting it as among the greatest instances of kindness for Christians to acquaint one another with what they observe to be amiss in their principles and conduct, and to reprove them for it.

9. It is their special duty to pray often one for the other—and particularly to plead that their meetings may be blessed for honouring God—the advancement of the members in holiness—and their attainment of meetness for a higher fellowship with God and the saints in heaven.

QUESTION II.

2 Corinthians xiii. 5,—“*Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith,*” &c.

What are some of the distinguishing evidences, whereby we may know whether we are true believers or hypocrites?

1. The believer, on coming to Christ, renounces all his own righteousness—and sensible of his unworthiness and vileness, accepts of Christ, not only as a priest to save him, but also as a prophet to teach him, and as a king to rule over him:—but the hypocrite is never truly sensible of his own unworthiness, vileness, and want of all good, and so never heartily accepts of Christ in all his offices.

2. The believer loves God, not only on account of his benefits, but also because of his loveliness in Himself or of his intrinsic excellency—but the hypocrite loves God only on account of what he receives from him—or rather he loves what he receives from God better than God himself.

3. The believer loves God though He frown upon him, humble him, and chastise him, and is desirous to have God glorified, though he should be despised, reproached, and persecuted—but the hypocrite cannot love God in the want of outward encouragements, and in the face of discouragements—his chief desire is to have the praise of men, and thus to rob God of his glory.

4. The believer serves God chiefly out of love to Him, and gratitude for redeeming grace. Through love to God, he perseveres in his service, though he be long without receiving comfort or sensible

advantage from it—but the hypocrite serves God chiefly with a view to reward from God or man. He becomes unwilling to continue in the service, if he is any length of time without receiving comfort, or sensible or supposed advantage from it.

5. The believer loves the saints because of the image of God upon them, and because they study to please God—but the hypocrite loves them because of some qualities which please him, or for his own advantage.

6. The believer hates sin, not only as it brings misery on the creature, but also as it dishonours and offends a pure and infinitely holy God—he not only studies rightly to perform public, social, and relative duties, but also secret and heart duties—he not only studies to abstain from open transgressions, but also from sins which no man sees, and from heart sins, and he studies to mortify sin in the first motions of it in his heart—but the hypocrite knows nothing of this—seeking only the applause of men and his own happiness, and living unconcerned about the glory of God.

QUESTION III.

1 John v. 12,—“*He that hath the Son hath life.*”

What life have they that have the Son?

1. They have a right in and through Christ to the temporal life which they enjoy.
2. They have a principle of spiritual life implanted in their souls by the Holy Spirit
3. They have spiritual life treasured up in Christ their glorious Head.
4. They have a right and title through Christ to eternal life.

QUESTION IV.

1 Thessalonians v. 19,—“*Quench not the Spirit.*”

How are professors guilty of quenching the Spirit?

1. By doing the works of the flesh.
2. By giving themselves to excessive worldly business or diversions when under convictions.
3. By refusing to yield to his motions exciting to the performance of religious duties.
4. By neglecting the performance of solemn vows and resolutions.
5. By not using the means prescribed by the Spirit for the increase of grace—such as reading and hearing the word, Christian conference, meditation, and prayer.
6. By neglecting to stir up into lively exercises the graces of faith, hope, repentance, zeal.
7. By leaving off soon religious exercises, where the motions of the Spirit are enjoyed.

QUESTION V.

Ephesians iv. 23,—“*And be renewed in the spirit of your mind.*”

What are the evidences of this renewal of the spirit of our mind?

They are such as these—

1. Being dissatisfied with the things of the world for a portion—

and choosing the Lord for our sure portion, giving Him the chief place in our hearts.

2. When Christ is truly precious to us in his person, offices, and his relations to his people.

3. Love to the people of God, chiefly because they are his—because they are like him and study to please him.

4. When the degrees of our love to the saints are according as they appear to resemble Christ, and live to his glory.

5. If we hate sin chiefly because it dishonours God, crucifies Christ, grieves the Holy Spirit, and defiles the precious and immortal soul.

6. When we are grieved from the heart for our own sins—even though we confide that their guilt and punishment are removed through Christ.

7. If we mourn not only for our own sins, but likewise for the sins of others—and that principally because God is dishonoured, and men's souls are polluted and ruined.

8. An earnest desire not only to be kept from sinning against God in our lives—but also, an intense longing after purity of heart—habitual self-loathing—and vigorous endeavours to mortify sin in our members.

QUESTION VI.

John xii. 26,—“*If any man serve me, let him follow me.*”

How must we follow Christ, if we would serve him acceptably?

1. We must follow his example, by imitating it.
2. We must follow his precepts, by obeying them.
3. We must follow the motions of his Spirit, by yielding to them.
4. We must follow his presence when withdrawing, by being instant in prayer for his return.

QUESTION VII.

Isaiah liv. 5,—“*Thy Maker is thy husband.*”

What are the characteristics of those who have the Lord Jesus Christ for their husband?

1. They have given their consent to the terms of the marriage-covenant, and are willing to be subject to Christ, and to be ruled by him.
2. They love him with a most affectionate and supreme love.
3. They have high and honourable thoughts of him.
4. They are frequently meditating on the things that are above, where Christ is.
5. They have on the wedding-robe of his righteousness, and are adorned with the graces of his Spirit.
6. They are obedient to his will.
7. They delight in those that do his will, as the friends of their husband.
8. They have a tender concern for his interest in the world.
9. They earnestly desire and delight in the tokens of his love.

10. They love his house, and seek to be in the place where his name is praised and his honour dwells.

11. They endeavour after habitual preparation for his coming to receive them home to himself, to dwell with Him throughout eternity.

QUESTION VIII.

Hosea xi. 7,—*“My people are bent to backsliding from me.”*

What are the signs of backsliding from God?

They are such as these—

1. Beginning to dally with temptation, and deliberating with ourselves about committing iniquity.

2. Not discerning the evil of sin as formerly—being less careful to abstain from every appearance of evil than we were before.

3. The want of a relish for spiritual things which we once possessed.

4. The absence of such earnest desires after communion with God in religious ordinances, as we had in former times.

5. Slothfulness in not pressing forward to the mark of the prize of the high calling in Christ Jesus.

QUESTION IX.

Psalm xlviii. 14,—*“For this God is our God for ever and ever; He will be our Guide even unto death.”*

What are distinctive marks of those who may safely conclude that God is their God for ever and ever, and will be their Guide even unto death?

1. They have chosen God for their Portion—Christ for their Saviour—the Holy Spirit for their Guide—the Word of God for their rule—the children of God for their companions—Divine ordinances as waiting-places on the King of Zion—the way of holiness for their walk in the world—and heaven as their blissful rest at the end of their journey.

2. They have full satisfaction in God as their Portion—improve Christ as their Saviour—comply with the motions of the Spirit—observe and obey the directions of the Word—delight in the society of the saints—frequent the ordinances as the means of communion with God—live a life of holiness—and labour to act as becomes the expectants of the heavenly inheritance.

II.—CORRESPONDENCE AMONG FELLOWSHIP MEETINGS.

It was stated in the “General Directions” for the management of Fellowship Meetings, that it is desirable that the different Societies in a congregation should occasionally correspond with one another,

by the interchange of delegates. It has been often found highly profitable to have such a plan of correspondence arranged that all the Fellowship Meetings in a congregation may, annually, or every half year, exchange visits, the one with the other; and in some instances, general meetings of delegates from all the societies meet once a quarter, or half yearly, to cultivate fraternal intercourse, inquire after the state of religion in the various fellowship meetings, to transact other congregational business, and to take mutual counsel respecting the advancement of religion.

The following is a specimen of such a method of correspondence, as adopted by *The Reformed Presbyterian Congregation of Paisley*, for the present year:—

“Table of Visitation for Fellowship Societies, from January 1855, to January 1856, agreed upon at the Meeting of Delegates.”

	Society No. 1 to visit No.	Society No. 2 to visit No.	Society No. 3 to visit No.	Society No. 4 to visit No.	Society No. 5 to visit No.	Society No. 6 to visit No.	Society No. 7 to visit No.	Society No. 8 to visit No.
<i>January.</i>	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	1
<i>February.</i>	3	4	5	6	7	8	1	2
<i>March.</i>	4	5	6	7	8	1	2	3
<i>April.</i>	5	6	7	8	1	2	3	4
<i>May.</i>	6	7	8	1	2	3	4	5
<i>June.</i>	7	8	1	2	3	4	5	6
<i>July.</i>	8	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<i>August.</i>	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	1
<i>September.</i>	3	4	5	6	7	8	1	2
<i>October.</i>	4	5	6	7	8	1	2	3
<i>November.</i>	5	6	7	8	1	2	3	4
<i>December.</i>	6	7	8	1	2	3	4	5

“It is requested that the visitations be made on as early an evening in the month as possible, and that the Societies in the country be visited during the summer months.”

The delegates, consisting of two representatives from each society, meet annually, to receive the reports of visitation during the year, and to settle the order of visits for the ensuing year. At the close of the printed form, are given Hints for conducting the Societies—which, as embodying, in a condensed form, some of the most important Directions which we have already given, we subjoin:—

“A few useful Hints for the better conducting of our Fellowship Meet-

ings, carefully selected, and approved of by the Meeting of Delegates, held 24th Nov. 1854:—

“The members of these Societies must be in the full fellowship of the Church; but persons of decent Christian character, who wish to correspond with the members of the Church, may be admitted as hearers. The children of members ought to attend, and receive special attention.

“The members meet in terms of proper equality, and are to conduct the exercises by rotation. The person who opens the meeting is President for the evening.

In conducting all the parts of the social exercises, regard must be paid to *time* and *proportion*. The passage selected should be intimated on the preceding evening.

“The remarks made on the question should be brief and pertinent; observations already made should not be repeated by others. Individuals ought not, by tedious discourse, to occupy the time of others. Female members or young persons might select and read parallel passages of Scripture to that under consideration.

“In conducting the business of the Society, attention should be paid to the Christian spirit in which all things are to be done. Members must study to conduct themselves in humility and love, and not to indulge in remarks that indicate a slighting of others.

“Regard must be paid to punctuality and regular attendance. The services should commence at the hour, there being two or three present; the member present first on the roll opening the meeting.

“Subjects should be selected to promote godly edifying, and taken up in pleasing variety and rotation—the doctrines of the Cross, the privileges of the covenant of grace, the holy duties of Christianity, &c. And it is the duty of members to ponder the subject by themselves, that they may be able to speak to the edification of others, and be prepared to hear, to discriminate, and to receive the remarks of other members.”

III.—QUERIES SUITABLE TO BE PROPOSED AT CORRESPONDING SOCIETIES,—AND TO COMMISSIONERS AT GENERAL MEETINGS.

As the intercourse of Fellowship Meetings, by the correspondence of delegates, should be improved to the utmost for the revival of religion, and exciting one another to all holy living, it has been found useful to have a summary of Queries prepared for the delegates—as a directory in inquiring after the state of religion in the Societies which they visit—and likewise for the Commissioners from the different Fellowship Meetings that convene in a General Meeting. The following is a specimen of such questions, as have been put in some congregations, upon such occasions, with the happiest effect. They are not

given as designed to be the only questions which should be proposed at the Corresponding meetings—but as suggesting the subjects of inquiry—and supplying hints in relation to the great matters which should engage the prayerful attention of brethren in their intercourse with each other:—

QUERIES, &C.

“1. Do you conscientiously and diligently attend upon the public ministrations of the House of God—the Word preached and Sacraments and Discipline administered, being careful to be present before public worship begins and to remain till the Congregation is dismissed by the Minister, preparing for such exercises by prayer and meditation, and endeavouring, while engaged in them, to mix faith with the hearing of the Word, and to recognize the presence and authority of Christ in his ordinances?

“2. Are you careful to give punctual attendance upon the meetings of the *Fellowship Society*, studying to regulate your affairs so as neither to absent yourself, nor to curtail the time devoted to the exercise? If the head of a family, do you endeavour to bring your children and domestics with you to public worship and social meetings? When in the Society, are you careful to obtain reasons of absence from members, and to judge of them in the spirit of faithfulness and meekness, and to reprove and admonish so that you may in no wise suffer sin on your brother? Do you dutifully, and as in the sight of the Searcher of hearts, declare to the Society your reasons of absence when at any time you are prevented from attending? Do you affectionately and readily render account to your brethren of aught in your conduct that may be matter of inquiry, and receive in the spirit of meekness their reproof; and do you study to lay yourself out in your deportment in society, so that you may provoke others to love and good works, and that your intercourse with the brethren may tend to mutual edification?

“3. In the family of which you are a member, are you careful to maintain the worship of God regularly at all seasons, morning and evening, and at such a time that your domestics can all attend? If the male head, do you not only observe it yourself, but require also the attendance upon it of all your household, as well servants as children? If the female, do you perform the duty yourself, when your husband is absent or unable to conduct it, or when you may be in a solitary condition? If a child or a servant, are you conscientiously endeavouring to be at no time allowedly absent from family worship? Do you see that the Sabbath be duly sanctified, preparation being made for it before its coming, and your household abstaining from all unnecessary bodily labour, avoiding visiting yourself and discountenancing visits by your children or domestics, and preventing all vain recreations or conversation in your family? And are you careful diligently to catechise and instruct your household at least every Sabbath evening?

“4. Can you truly affirm, as in the sight of the Lord that liveth

and seeth you, that you give yourself to reading the Word daily, to meditation, self-examination, and secret prayer—that you do attend to secret prayer at least every morning and evening, and that, in performing it, you join watchfulness with prayer, and seek retirement for the duty, not resting satisfied, as the manner of some is, with only a few serious thoughts on the bed in lying down and rising up?

“5. Do you in your walk and conversation study to preserve a conscience void of offence towards God and man; avoiding every appearance of evil, and giving no offence to Jew or Gentile, that the Gospel be not blamed? For this purpose, are you endeavouring to cherish the feelings of warm and affectionate brotherhood towards the members of the Church, remembering their cases, in your applications to the Throne of Grace, and so acting towards them that you may be said to *“weep with them that weep, and rejoice with them that rejoice,”* and to bear each other's burdens, fulfilling the law of Christ? In your intercourse with mankind, are you studying to live in a state of holy separation from the world, and to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness but to reprove them? In your dealings, are you careful to provide things honest in the sight of all men; observing strict punctuality in your engagements, taking care to enter into no speculations that may endanger your own character and that of the Church, and conscientiously paying your just debts according to your ability? Do you study to do to others as you would that they in similar circumstances should do to you? And in your whole deportment, can you truly say, that you set the Lord before you, dreading his holy indignation before the fear of man, and seeking continually his gracious approbation, more than the favour or friendship of the world?

“6. Are you constantly endeavouring to maintain a holy reverence for God's great name, by avoiding all rash or irreverent mention of it in the way of blessing yourself or others when taken by surprise; all rash or minced oaths; every abuse of the lot, as in games of chance, &c.; and all abusing of the creatures of God? And do you, on every proper occasion, reprove, instruct, and warn others who may offend in any of these ways?

“7. Do you conscientiously, according to your ability, contribute to the support of the Gospel? Do you cheerfully and liberally dedicate a portion of your substance for the advancement of Christ's kingdom throughout the earth? And are you faithfully endeavouring to consider the case of the poor, and to contribute for their relief according to the Divine rule recorded, 1 Cor. xvi. 2?

“8. On special occasions, when the circumstances of the Church, or your families, or your own souls, appear to require it, are you careful to observe a day of personal or family fasting or thanksgiving—and do you endeavour to stir up others of your brethren to the same duties?

“9. Finally, in your family, and as a member of the Society and Congregation, are you careful to watch against every thing in your temper, words, and conduct, that might tend to wound the conscience

of the weakest brother, or that might weaken brotherly affection? And, as far as in you lies, do you labour to prevent strife among brethren, to heal divisions, and to bring the assemblies of Zion to such a state of peace and concord, as will evidence that the God of love and peace continually dwells there?"

QUESTIONS TO THE COMMISSIONERS.

"1. Have you good reason to believe that all the members of the Society which you represent are living in the performance of the personal and relative duties to which they are pledged by their solemn Covenanted profession?"

"2. Is the attendance of your members upon the public and social ordinances satisfactory? If there are exceptions, state them to the meeting, with the steps which have been taken to ensure greater punctuality?"

"3. In respect of the number of members, is your Society on the increase or decrease—mention, if possible, the exact number by which it has increased or diminished since the last general meeting, with the *causes* which have led to the alteration?"

"4. What is the state of your correspondence with other Societies of the Congregation?"

"5. If any of your members are declining in their profession, refractory against the discipline of the Church, or unwilling to contribute regularly, according to their ability, for the support of the Gospel, what steps have been taken by the Society to reclaim them? If these have proved unavailing, have they withdrawn from brethren that walk thus disorderly?"

"6. Does your Society employ any means for *spreading the knowledge of the truth* throughout the neighbourhood in which its members are scattered, and to increase its numbers? If so, state what means are employed, and the result?"

"7. Have you any evidence of the growth of vital godliness among the members of your Society, or of the ordinances being blessed to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace?"

IV.—FELLOWSHIP MEETINGS, A MEANS OF THEOLOGICAL INSTRUCTION—DR. M'LEOD.

In the Memoir of the late Dr. M'Leod, of New York, an instance is related of the salutary influence of Societies for united prayer, in imparting solid and extensive views of Theology, and in preparing for eminent usefulness.

Dr. M'Leod was son of a minister of the Established Church of Scotland, whose parish was located in the Highlands, and who is mentioned with high commendation by Dr. Johnson, in his "*Tour to the Hebrides*." His father dying while he was a boy, Dr. M'Leod

emigrated to the United States, in 1792, while he was yet scarcely eighteen years of age. Soon after his arrival, he proceeded to the townships of Princeton and Duanesburgh, a few miles from Albany. Here he found a number of families who had some time before emigrated from the Highlands of Scotland. These were distinguished for simple and unostentatious piety—and the youthful M'Leod being attracted towards them from love to his countrymen and congeniality of spirit, became a favourite with them, and cultivated with them an intercourse which was spiritual and mutually profitable.

At the time he became acquainted with this people, he had become dissatisfied with the Erastian subjection of Established Churches to the State, and with the law of Patronage—and he began to inquire earnestly after that ecclesiastical system which was most accordant with the “law and the testimony.” By a singular coincidence, the Highlanders about the same time were engaged in a similar process of inquiry after religious truth. With much diligence and prayer, they employed Scriptural means to enable them to ascertain the path of duty. In conjunction with Mr. M'Leod, they constituted themselves into Societies for prayer and Christian conference. Having procured the Testimonies of such churches as they considered approximating nearest to the requirements of the word of God, they read, compared, and discussed the doctrines contained in them, praying for Divine light and direction; the result was that, in process of time, they finally adopted the Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church. Seldom, indeed, has any people more intelligently and cordially embraced the articles of their religious creed than did these Societies on the banks of the Mohawk river, with which Mr. M'Leod had connected himself. In subsequent life, when he had taken his place among the most distinguished in America for theological acquirements, the question was asked him, “*Where did you study theology?*” “**IN THE SOCIETIES**”—was the answer. Not a few of the devoted ministers of Christ, in various lands, have been indebted to the same Scriptural institution for the most valuable of their theological attainments.

V.—CONCERTS FOR UNITED PRAYER.

We have noticed the method of *Concerts for Prayer*, as embracing in it much of the distinguished excellencies of the Fellowship Meeting, and as possessing not a few of its special advantages. In America, those who take an interest in the work of Foreign Missions, have been accustomed, from an early period, to observe a monthly *Concert of Prayer*, in behalf of missionaries labouring among the heathen, and for the evangelization of the world. The *Missionary Herald*, and other organs of missionary intelligence, make frequent mention of the blessed effects flowing from these united supplications of the Lord's “remembrancers.” Sometimes, the labourers in distant fields have obtained renewed strength in trial and difficulty, at the time that prayer was offered up in their behalf, and sometimes, they

have, by the same means, had remarkable encouragement and success in their work.

During late years, it has been usual for some devoted persons, about the end or commencement of the year, to issue a Call for a "Concert of united Prayer," to be observed for a period of eight or ten days, and to publish at the same time a summary of reasons for the observance of the appointment, or of subjects of special prayer. Such calls have been willingly responded to by a large number of Christians of different names, and in various countries—and we have reason to believe that the effects have been eminently beneficial to the Church. It seems to us deserving of consideration whether such proposals for united prayer might not be carried out to great advantage by gathering together, during the time of the Concert, those who earnestly desire the revival of true religion and the advancement of Christ's Kingdom, in fellowship meetings, as well as engaging them in private prayer, at certain agreed hours of the day.

The meetings of the EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE may be regarded as exemplifications of the value of the Social Prayer-meeting. Soon as the Christian Church will generally recognize the spiritual obligation of the fellowship meeting for prayer, spiritual converse and mutual counsel, and shall bring its membership into connexion with this institution, may we hope to see, not only a union of affection and fundamental principles—but a full and lasting union in the profession of all scriptural truth, established. Why should not Christians aim at this higher and complete unity—and pray and labour for its attainment? It is certainly promised—and will in a future day of blessing, be fully established. "*The Lord shall be King over all the earth—there shall be one Lord and his name one.*"

It has been found beneficial to observe a Concert for united Prayer—in behalf of ministers and office-bearers of the Church—and on account of the success of the Gospel, at an appointed hour on Saturday evening, and sometimes on Sabbath morning. This has been attended to, by agreement, by some ministers, elders, and others, for some years—and whatever may be the results to the Church generally, it has been found to be productive of singular benefits to those who have cordially taken part in the exercise. Their own spirits have been refreshed, and they have been animated and strengthened in their work, by knowing that there were beloved brethren, in various places, actuated by the same spirit, who were pleading in their behalf, and who were earnestly seeking for the revival of the Lord's work in the earth.

CALL TO CONCERT IN PRAYER BY THE EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE.

The late Conference of the *Evangelical Alliance* assembled in Paris, issued the following invitation to United Prayer. We willingly insert it, as we regard such calls to a solemn duty as peculiarly interesting at the present time, and the objects referred to as most important:—

"Since the year 1846, when renewed efforts were made to promote a closer union between the members of the Church Universal, many Christians have agreed among themselves to unite in prayer on a

particular day in every week. The number of those who have adopted this godly practice has continually increased; and for several years past, the same day has witnessed Christians in different parts of the world offering up the same prayers for their brethren.

"The Paris Conference reiterates this appeal, and urges the adoption of the practice upon all their brethren. They invite all Christians to agree in presenting their prayers to the Lord on a fixed day in every week, for the following objects:—

"1. For the prosperity of the Church of Christ; especially imploring the blessing of God on Missionary labours, whether home or foreign, established in those countries to which the persons whose signatures are attached to this document belong.

"2 For the union of Christians in each country, and for the union of Christians of different countries, as all constituting the different members of the same body, which is the Church of Christ.

"3. That it may please God speedily to remove those obstacles which prevent the universal extension of his Kingdom, and to put an end to every system of error, idolatry, and unbelief, which opposes itself to the doctrine of the Gospel.

"4. That He would be pleased to hasten the general accomplishment of prophecy, and of those promises in particular which are made to Israel, and to the world at large through them.

"5. That all who unite in these prayers may, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, make progress in faith, in sanctification, and in spiritual peace.

"MONDAY MORNING is the time which has hitherto been observed for this united prayer."

G. FISCH,	}	For France.
H. J. GRANDPIERRE,		
F. W. KRUMMACHER,	}	For Germany.
ED. KUNTZE,		
C. E. EARDLEY,	}	For England.
CARR JOHN GLYN,		
ALEXANDER DE ST. GEORGE,	}	For Switzerland.
ADRIEN NAVILLE,		
L. DE SANCTIS,	}	For Italy.
J. P. MEILLE,		
ELOUT DE SOUTERWOUDE,	}	For Holland.
A. CAPPADOCE, M. D.,		
ED. PANCHAUD,	}	For Belgium.
LEONARD ANET,		
C. H. A. KALKER,		For Denmark.
C. BERGMAN, PASTOR,	}	For Sweden.
J. BERGER, CAPTAIN,		
R. BAIRD, D. D.,	}	For United States.
G. H. STUART,		
W. G. SCHAUFFLER,		For Turkey.

WORKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

1. **YOUTHFUL DEVOTEDNESS**: or the Youth of the Church Instructed in the Duties of Practical Religion. By THOS. HOUSTON, D. D., Knockbracken—with Recommendatory Preface by Professor SYMINGTON, D. D., Paisley—Foolscap 8vo.—Price 2s. 6d.

OPINIONS OF THE PRESS.

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“The author writes in a manner becoming his theme—with gravity, earnestness, clearness, affection, persuasiveness, and Scriptural fullness.”—*Scot. Presby. Mag.*

“A work much needed, and ably executed.—Would to Heaven that thousands of our youth would peruse its pages, receive its lessons, and apply its rules!”—*Scottish Guardian.*

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“An invaluable work.—It is written with great clearness and perspicuity—characterized by a force and an eloquence of style which will not fail to interest the reader. Dr. Houston has admirably performed the task of setting forth, with unanswerable arguments, and in an eloquent manner, the nature and the ends, the institution and the duties of Christian Baptism. We most earnestly and most emphatically commend his work to the attention of our readers, in the firm conviction that while it supplies a void in our literature on these subjects, it will be the means of doing much good. We cordially thank Dr. H. for having so opportunely come forward with this publication, in a form and at a price that will place it within almost every one's reach.”—*Rothsay Journal*.

“Dr. Houston is well known to the public as a practical writer on sacred themes; and, in the book before us, he follows up his excellent system of plain and sound instruction with the earnestness of one who feels his responsibility, and is heartily devoted to his task. It is a practical work rather than a controversial one; and it is well; for just now, on a subject so thoroughly canvassed as Christian Baptism, an Essay written in a kindly Christian spirit is preferable to a dogmatical treatise, how learned and acute soever. At the same time, Dr. Houston gives us here a lucid and cogent statement of the arguments for infant Baptism—a statement that cannot give offence to any right-thinking Baptist.—We commend this little work to the serious attention of Christian families, convinced that, by aiding its circulation, we help on a good work.”—*Londonderry Standard*.

"We have risen from the perusal of this treatise with mingled feelings of regret and satisfaction—regret that our views and practice have been so far beneath the dignity and obligations of the ordinance, as here exhibited; and satisfaction at the very concise and complete elucidation of the Baptismal rite in its varied bearings. While there is not in this treatise the least parade of learning, there is the result of extensive reading and close study; a complete summary of arguments on the chief subjects usually discussed in the Baptismal controversy; and a faithful detail of the pastoral and parental duties in connection with the ordinance of Baptism."—*Monitor*.

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